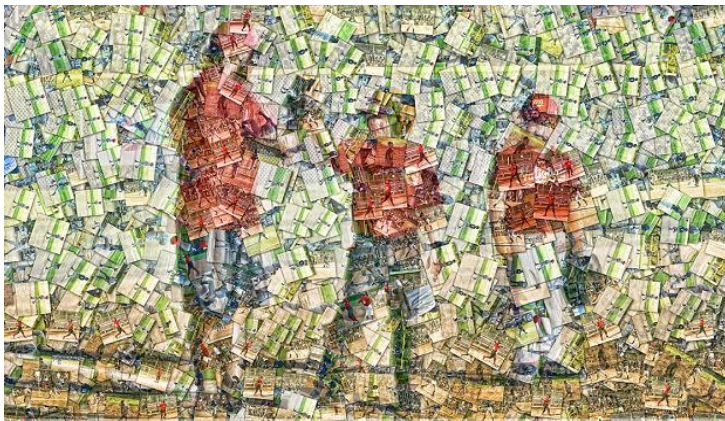




Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation

Baseball Coaching Manual



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Welcome & Important Information

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Congratulations on your decision to take your first steps coaching youth sports within Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation. Volunteer coaches serve as positive role models to the youth of our community while helping them to develop strong character and encouraging them to perform to the best of their abilities. This handbook is designed as a one-stop resource to support coaches in our youth sports program in providing a safe environment for children to have fun, learn new skills and enjoy youth sports. This is achieved by volunteer coaches teaching the fundamentals of a sport and allowing children to enjoy everything that sport is about.

This handbook is intended to increase your knowledge and understanding of the coaching process within Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation youth sports and enable volunteer coaches to become more confident coaching youths. This is achieved by:

- Understanding our Mission Statement, program philosophy, goals, guidelines, conduct standards and procedures.
- Providing coaches, a better understanding of the delivery of sport specific skills with safe, effective and organized practices.

All coaches possess their own unique skill set based on experience, personality, philosophy and knowledge. All effective coaches, however, have certain skills in common, which include:

- Planning skills
- Communication skills
- Motivational skills
- Organizational and Administrative skills
- Analytical skills
- Flexibility of style appropriate to individual players' needs

This handbook will help set you on your way to becoming a more confident and effective youth sports coach.

The role of volunteer coach means that you will be held in high esteem and will become an important role model for young people. Do not underestimate the importance of your volunteer coach position in the eyes of your players and their parents. It is therefore vital that all volunteer coaches working within Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation Department (MCPRD) Youth Sports read, understand and agree to abide by the content and underlying principles of the **National Youth Sports Coaches Association (NYSCA) Coaches' Code of Ethics** (available on page 5) or as a [download](#).

All head coaches must be certified under the **National Youth Sports Coaches Association (NYSCA)** and are required to complete NYSCA sport specific training. This training is conducted on-line and the \$20 membership fee is paid for by MCPRD Youth sports via the home recreation centers where they will be coaching. The recreation center's chapter director for NYSCA must create each coach's separate account with the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS).

Youth Sports Volunteer Coaches'

Expectations

- Make practice and games safe (ensure playing areas are free from any hazards before play begins), conduct adequate warm-up and cool-down times, etc. and FUN
- Teach sport skills to all players, not just gifted ones
- Encourage, reward and praise their young athletes' efforts
- Remember that effort is more important than winning (accept the "youth athletes first, winning second" perspective on youth sports)
- Permit athletes to share in the leadership and decision making for their team, including team rules
- Be the team "leader" and continuously set positive and uplifting examples of good sportsmanship for their players and their players' parents.
- Continuously encourage, monitor and help enforce their players' and parents' Code of Ethics (see pages 6-8).

Code of Ethics for Youth Coaches

(NYSCA)

I hereby pledge to live up to my certification as a NYSCA Coach by following the NYSCA Coaches' Code of Ethics:

- I will place the emotional and physical well-being of my players ahead of a personal desire to win.
- I will treat each player as an individual, remembering the large range of emotional and physical development for the same age group.
- I will do my best to provide a safe playing situation for my players.
- I promise to review and practice basic first aid principles needed to treat injuries of my players.
- I will do my best to organize practices that are fun and challenging for all my players.
- I will lead by example in demonstrating fair play and sportsmanship to all my players.

- I will provide a sports environment for my team that is free of drugs, tobacco and alcohol and I will refrain from their use at all youth sports events.
- I will be knowledgeable in the rules of each sport that I coach and will teach these rules to my players.
- I will use those coaching techniques appropriate for all of the skills that I teach.
- I will remember that I am a youth sports coach and that the game is for children and not adults.

Code of Ethics for Players (NYSCA)

I hereby pledge to be positive about my youth sports experiences and accept responsibility for my participation by following this Players' Code of Ethics pledge:

- I will encourage good sportsmanship from fellow players, coaches, officials and parents at every game and practice by demonstrating good sportsmanship.
- I will attend every practice and game that I can and will notify my coach if I cannot.
- I will expect to receive a fair and equal amount of playing time.
- I will do my very best to listen and learn from my coaches.
- I will treat my coaches, other players, officials and fans with respect regardless of race, sex, creed or abilities and I will expect to be treated accordingly.
- I deserve to have fun during my sports experience and will alert parents or coaches if it stops being fun.
- I deserve to play in an environment that is free from drugs, tobacco and alcohol and expect adults to refrain from their use at all youth sports events.
- I will encourage my parents to be involved with my team in some capacity because it is important to me.
- I will do my very best in school.
- I will remember that sports participation is an opportunity to learn and have fun.

Code of Ethics for Parents (NYSCA)

The Parents Alliance for Youth Sports (PAYS) program sets a standard for parent education by providing a video-based educational program which offers a simple, effective way to make youth sports parents aware of their roles and responsibilities, as well as ways they can make their child's experience more enjoyable and positive.

I hereby pledge to provide positive support, care and encouragement for my child participating in youth sports by following this PAYS Parents Code of Ethics:

- I will encourage good sportsmanship by demonstrating positive support for all players, coaches and officials at every game, practice or other youth sports event.
- I will place the emotional and physical well-being of my child ahead of a personal desire to win.
- I will insist that my child play in a safe and healthy environment.
- I will require that my child's coach be trained in the responsibilities of being a youth sports coach and that the coach upholds the Coaches Code of Ethics.
- I will support coaches and officials working with my child, in order to encourage a positive and enjoyable experience for all.
- I will demand a sports environment for my child that is free from drugs, tobacco and alcohol and will refrain from their use at all youth sports events.
- I will remember that the game is for youth – not for adults.
- I will do my very best to make youth sports fun for my child.
- I will help my child to enjoy the youth sports experience by doing whatever I can, such as being a respectful fan, assisting with coaching or providing transportation.
- I will ask my child to treat other players, coaches, fans and officials with respect regardless of race, sex, creed or ability.
- I will read the National Standards for Youth Sports and do what I can to help all youth sports organizations implement and enforce them.

Mission Statement and Related Items

The Mission:

“To provide an environment for children to learn the fundamentals of sports while emphasizing the importance of teamwork, sportsmanship, physical fitness and fair play”

Program Philosophy

The three main guiding principles for our youth sports programs are:

1. Safety
2. Fun
3. Participant development based on:
 - Everyone Plays:** Provide opportunities to learn skills and improve conditioning by minimizing roster sizes and ensuring players play at least half of every game.
 - Balanced Teams:** Build teams that are evenly balanced on age and experience.
 - Positive Coaching:** Train and encourage coaches to help develop a child’s sense of self-worth.
 - Sportsmanship:** Create a safe, fair, fun and positive environment based on mutual respect.

Program Goals

Fun and enjoyment: Provide all youth ages 3-18 with opportunities for participation, fun and enjoyment.

Leisure Skills Development: Provide opportunities for youth to develop lifetime leisure skills.

Physical Development: Assist youth with physical development by:

- Teaching fundamental and safe sport skills appropriate for their age
- Providing opportunities to improve their physical conditioning
- Teaching sound health habits
- Providing safe playing areas and proper supplies and equipment

Psychological Development: Help youth develop psychologically by:

- Fostering the development of self-worth and personal identity
- Providing opportunities to express and control emotions
- Creating a learning environment

Social Development: Help youth develop socially by providing opportunities to:

- Have fun with others
- Learn independence and the importance of teamwork
- Learn cooperation and sportsmanship
- Develop leadership skills and initiative

- Learn how to compete – how to put winning and losing in proper perspective

Concept of Winning:

- Participants can learn from both winning and losing if winning is placed in a healthy perspective
- Winning is not the primary goal. Do not define success as only winning.
- Losing a game or sporting event is not a reflection on the participant's self-worth
- Success is directly related to one's effort and is found in striving for the best that one can do

Program Guidelines

Player Eligibility:

Ineligible Players: Participants can play on only one (1) team within the Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation league structure. Any player listed on multiple rosters or participating on multiple teams will be found to be ineligible immediately. Any and all teams which the ineligible player is found to be listed on the roster of will be subject to forcible forfeit of all games found in violation pending an investigation. An ineligible player will be subject to suspension, pending review of the incident(s). Any team manager/coach knowingly or willingly playing a suspended or ineligible player will be suspended for one (1) calendar year or more from all MCPRD Youth Sports activities.

Equal play opportunities are provided for all youth regardless of race, creed, sex, economic status or ability.

- Sex/race stereotyping and prejudice of any kind are prohibited
- Adult youth sports leaders must demonstrate a tolerance of and respect for people of all abilities, sizes, shapes, colors, cultural and economic backgrounds.
- Each league is subject to Mecklenburg County's Inclusion Statement and a "MUST PLAY" rule that ensures participation for all youth regardless of race, creed, sex, economic status or ability.
- There is an active coaching recruitment program to recruit and select qualified women, men and minorities to be trained as National Youth Sports Coaches Association (NYSCA) certified coaches.
- Sexual harassment issues should be reported to a member of MCPRD staff immediately. There is zero tolerance for this behavior.
- **ADA Compliance:** In order to comply with the American Disabilities Act, league rules may be adapted in order to accommodate participation. An "ADA Exception Form" will be submitted prior to the beginning of league play and approved by Karla Gray, Therapeutics Division Director and the Youth Sports staff and kept on file to verify applicable changes of league rules.

Inclusion Statement Policy:

"Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department encourages and promotes inclusive leisure experiences in all of our programs, activities and sports. Inclusive leisure experiences encourage and enhance opportunities for people of varying abilities to participate and interact in life's activities together with dignity. It also provides an environment that promotes and fosters physical, social and psychological inclusion of people with diverse experiences and skill levels. Inclusion enhances individuals' potential for full and active participation in leisure activities and experiences."

Must Play Rule:

All teams must abide by the “MUST PLAY” Rule to meet the minimum required playing time or each player. Coaches must play all players as equally as possible to ensure skill development for all participants. Player substitutions should be managed as a priority over competition.

- **Tee Ball** – Coaches should play all players at all times. Once the required defensive infield positions are assigned, the remaining players shall be equally distributed to the outfield space. No player should be sitting on the bench unless injured.
- **Machine Pitch & Player Pitch** – All players present must play at least 2 innings defensively by the end of the 3rd inning (unless an injury occurs).

Inclement Weather Policy:

During summer weather conditions, the children will not be allowed to play when the temperature and/or heat index is in excess of 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

- In the event that playing conditions become too wet or unsafe for general use to continue play due to inclement weather, the Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department will utilize the Rain-Out Hotline # **(704-432-3834)** to notify coaches, parents, participants and the general public as to exactly which programs and facilities have been affected. Inclement weather notifications can also be followed via social media and GOV Delivery email subscriptions.
- When thunderstorms with lightning or severe weather patterns are witnessed:
 1. If at scheduled game time or after the game starts, the senior staff member on site will make a determination whether to cancel the game(s) due to inclement weather
 2. If thunderstorms w/lightning, all players and coaches will exit the playing field and seek shelter in cars until the storm passes. An automatic 30-minute delay will occur with thunder and/or lightning and the time will reset with each strike until a 30-minute period has passed without any thunder and/or lightning to continue play.

Practice and Game Day Safety:

The number one priority of the MCPRD youth sports program is the safety of all participants. All efforts need to be made to ensure that a safe environment is maintained at all scheduled team practices and games by adhering to the following:

- All playing areas are checked for any hazards prior to the start of each scheduled practice and game.
- All players are wearing the required safety equipment (i.e. mouthpiece for flag football, shin guards for soccer, etc.) and the proper uniforms/clothing and footwear (rubber/molded cleats or turf shoes) before each scheduled practice and game,
- Adequate warm-up and cool down times (suggested 2-5 minutes) are provided before each scheduled practice and game.
- During scheduled games, all spectators are required to stand back from playing areas to minimize player distraction.
- Thunder and lightning – please refer to the Inclement Weather Policy noted in the above section.

Note – during scheduled games, MCPRD staff will take the lead to ensure safe playing conditions at all times.

Conduct Standards and Procedures

Code of Conduct:

MCPRD possesses a **ZERO TOLERANCE** policy for coaches, participants, parents and spectators in regards to inappropriate conduct and reserves the right to assess suspensions and/or prohibit attendance/participation at their discretion in order to maintain safety, appropriate conduct and overall program integrity. Each coach, participant parent and spectator will be held accountable for the following conduct standards:

Sportsmanship/Inappropriate Behavior:

Any and all team-affiliated persons (coaches, participants, parents and spectators) must conduct themselves in a sportsmanlike manner when involved in any MCPRD's youth athletic programs. This rule applies to conduct on all MECKLENBURG COUNTY PARK PROPERTY before, during and after scheduled events.

NOTE: If spectators and/or affiliated persons' conduct become overly unruly and unsportsmanlike during the course of the game, the MCPRD staff and game officials reserve the authority to ultimately remove the offending person(s) from the premises for the remainder of the game, or in extreme circumstances, empty the facility and allow only coaches and players to remain in an effort to finish game play. Failure to comply with MCPRD staff and/or game officials request for facility removal will result in a forfeit by the applicable team.

Important Reminder – Head Coaches are held responsible for the conduct of all of their team related participants, including spectators.

Bullying/Intimidation:

Coaches, participants, parents and spectators must not threaten, verbally abuse or make physical contact of an aggressive behavior with any other coaches, participants, spectator, Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation staff or game officials.

Child Abuse/Neglect – Mandatory Reporting:

Per Mecklenburg County's Volunteer Services Policy, North Carolina law requires staff to report any suggested abuse or neglect of a child or a vulnerable adult to the appropriate authorities or to the local police. As a volunteer for Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation, you are expected to follow these same guidelines. You may report your concerns to any member of the MCPRD youth sports or facility staff or anonymously to Child Protective Services at **704-336-2273**.

Communication with Officials:

Questioning/Arguing judgement calls made by game officials is **STRICTLY PROHIBITED**. ONLY HEAD COACHES will be permitted to consult with the game officials and this **MUST ONLY BE DONE IN A SPORTSMANLIKE MANNER**. It is in the best interest of head coaches to approach the game officials in a courteous manner and in the presence of MCPRD staff whenever possible.

Arguing/disputing judgement calls is strictly prohibited and will be viewed as verbal abuse. Coaches, participants, parents and/or spectators are not permitted to badger, criticize, harass or mock game officials.

Coaches, participants, parents and/or spectators must not threaten, verbally abuse or make physical contact of an aggressive nature with any of the game officials (this includes game support staff such as scorekeepers, timers, etc.).

Coaching Staff:

Head Coaches are RESPONSIBLE for the eligibility of all their players, as well as the conduct of all participants, parents and spectators. Failure to comply with this MCPRD rule may result in the Head Coach being restricted to his/her bench and seated for the remainder of the game.

Alcohol/Illegal Substances:

The possession of, use of and/or participation while under the influence of alcohol or any illegal substance is strictly prohibited.

Ejections:

Any coaches, participants or spectators who are ejected will be automatically suspended and ineligible to coach, participate and/or spectate until such time that they are notified by the MCPRD Youth Sports staff.

Incident Procedures:

Individuals reported to be ejected or in violation of the Code of Conduct will be notified and asked to provide a written statement regarding the details of the incident in question as well as their involvement or participation in said incident by 5:00pm of the following Tuesday to a MCPRD Youth Sports staff person at YouthSports@MecklenburgCountyNC.gov. Failure to provide a written statement is viewed as an admission of guilt and will be grounds for suspension.

Suspensions:

All volunteer coaches must abide by Volunteer Services' policies, specifically in the area of conduct. Volunteer coaches are an extension of the Park and Recreation department which adheres to a 'zero tolerance' policy regarding conduct.

Any coaches, participants or spectators who are suspended from league play will be ineligible to coach, participate and/or spectate for the duration of their suspension term. This includes any and all program related activities.

Any violation while under suspension will be treated as a 2nd offense and all penalties will apply, including extending the existing suspension.

Any suspension occurring with less than two games remaining in the regular season will result in suspension from the remaining regular season games, as well as any and all upcoming post-season tournament games.

Any suspension for a term of six months or more will require a written request for reinstatement to be submitted following the suspension term. The request may be emailed to YouthSports@MecklenburgCountyNC.gov or mailed to MCPRD Youth Sports, 1225 Remount Road, Charlotte, NC 28208. The Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Department reserves the right to deny reinstatement and/or extend any and all suspensions.

League rules provide guidance regarding ejections/suspensions. For a complete guide regarding suspensions, please ask park and recreation staff for a copy of the youth sports suspension policy.

Contact Information

Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Youth Sports

Address: Revolution Park Sports Academy
1225 Remount Road
Charlotte, NC 28208

Phone: 980-314-1116

Fax: 704-335-3199

Email: YouthSports@MecklenburgCountyNC.gov

Website: www.parkandrec.com

Social Media: <https://www.facebook.com/#!/mecklenburgcountyparkandrecreation>
<https://twitter.com/meckparkrec>

Youth Sports Updated Info and Inclement Weather Hotline:

704-432-3834

Recreation Center Locations

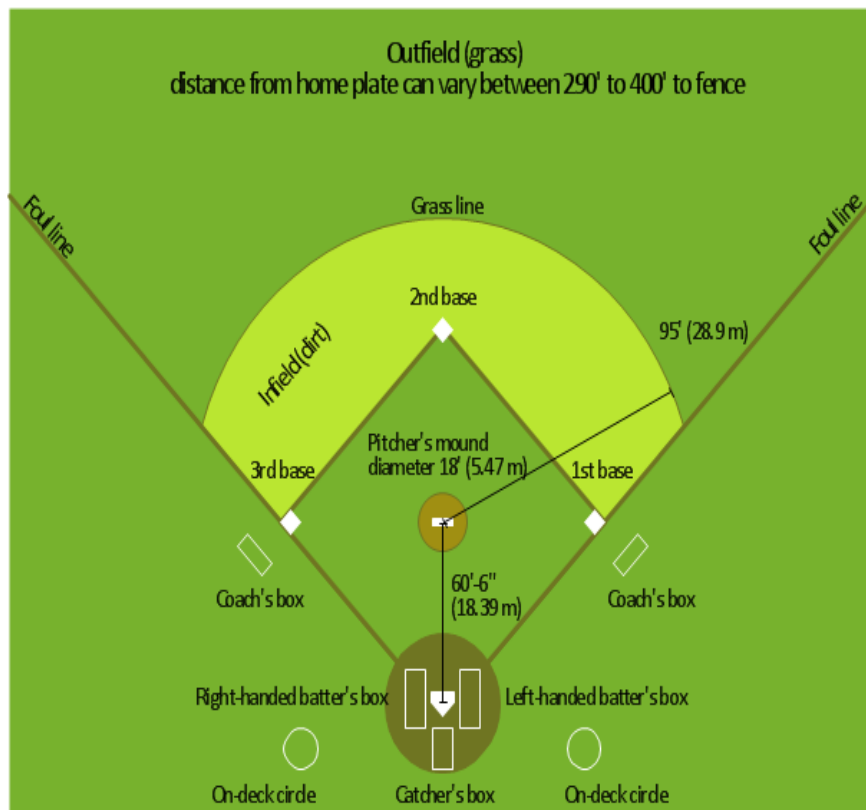
<u>Albemarle Road</u>	980-314-1123
5027 Idlewild Rd. 28227	<u>Naomi Drenan</u>
980-314-1101	750 Beal St. 28211
<u>Arbor Glen</u>	980-314-1100
1520 Clanton Rd. 28208	<u>Ray's Splash Planet</u>
980-314-1110	215 N. Sycamore St. 28202
<u>Berewick</u>	980-314-4729
5910 Dixie River Rd. 28278	<u>Revolution Park Sports Academy</u>
980-314-1102	1225 Remount Rd. 28208
<u>Bette Rae Thomas</u>	980-314-1116
2921 Tuckaseegee Rd. 28208	<u>Southview</u>
980-314-1111	1720 Vilma St. 28208
<u>Elon</u>	980-314-1105
11401 Ardrey Kell Rd. 28277	<u>Sugaw Creek</u>
980-314-1103	943 W. Sugar Creek Rd. 28213
<u>Hickory Grove</u>	980-314-1124
6709 Pence Rd. 28215	<u>Tom Sykes</u>
980-314-1122	1501 Euclid Ave. 28203
<u>Ivory/Baker</u>	980-314-1113
1920 Stroud Park Ct. 28206	<u>Tuckaseegee</u>
980-314-1112	4820 Tuckaseegee Rd. 28208
<u>Mallard Creek</u>	980-314-1115
2530 Johnston-Oehler Rd. 28269	<u>Wallace Pruitt</u>
980-314-1121	440 Tuckaseegee Rd. 28208
<u>Marion Diehl</u>	980-314-1114
2219 Tyvola Rd. 28210	<u>West Charlotte</u>
980-314-1300	2401 Kendall Dr. 28216
<u>Methodist Home</u>	980-314-1120
3200 Shamrock Dr. 28215	

SECTION 2

FIELD OF PLAY **AND RULES**

The Field of Play

In major league baseball, the bases are 90 feet apart, and laid out in a diamond configuration that aligns with lines drawn from the point of home plate extending to the end of the playing field. The pitching mound is in the center of the diamond (called the “infield”) and the pitching rubber is 60’ 6” from the tip of home plate. Any ball hit within the field of play is considered “fair” and in play, and balls hit outside of it are considered “foul.” In youth baseball, the dimensions of the field – the distance between the bases and the distance from the pitching rubber to home plate – are scaled back to account for the smaller size and strength of the children playing it, and these are covered in specific rules for each of the age divisions. (See the baseball field diagram below for additional information.)



Equipment & Uniforms

Individual Equipment Requirements

Baseball requires different types of equipment at different levels in youth baseball, but the following individual equipment is typically provided by the parents and/or sponsors for each player:

Glove: Each player is typically responsible to provide their own fielding glove. It is strongly recommended that parents avoid purchasing smaller, plastic gloves for their young players, as these are very difficult to use and will inhibit the players' ability to learn how to catch. The size chart below illustrates recommended size charts for various ages and positions. For players just starting out, it is recommended that they have a "regular" type of fielders' glove (not a specialized catcher's glove or first baseman's mitt), as they could be playing any position. A good beginners' glove that's about 9" and is really all that is needed as a player is starting out.

Baseball Glove Sizing Chart by Position						
Age	Catcher	First Base	Second Base/ Short Stop	Third Base	Pitcher	Outfield
Under 7	29.5-30"	11.5"	8-10.5"	8-10.5"	8-10.5"	9-10.5"
8-10	30-31"	11.5-12"	10.5-11.25"	10.5-11.5"	10.5-11.5"	10-12"
11-13	30-32.5"	11.5-12"	11-11.5"	11-11.75"	11.5-12"	11.75-12.75"
Over 14	32-34.5"	12-13"	11.25-11.5"	11.5-12"	11.5-12"	12-13"

Fastpitch Softball Glove Sizing Chart by Position						
Age	Catcher	First Base	Second Base/ Short Stop	Third Base	Pitcher	Outfield
Under 7	29.5-30"	11.5"	8-10.5"	8-10.5"	8-10.5"	9-11"
8-10	30-32"	11.5-12"	10.5-11.25"	10.5-11.5"	10.5-11.5"	10-12"
11-13	31-32.5"	12-13"	11.25-12"	11.75-12.5"	11.5-12.5"	11.75-12.5"
Over 14	33-35"	12-13"	11.5-12.5"	11.75-12.5"	11.5-12.5"	12-13"

Slowpitch Softball Glove Sizing Chart by Position				
First Base	Second Base/ Short Stop	Third Base	Pitcher	Outfield
12-13"	11.5-12.5"	11.75-13"	11.5-13"	12-15"

As a players' skill and love for the game increase, more specialized, higher quality gloves can be purchased at significantly greater cost. For a beginner, however, it is best to avoid both high-priced and really inexpensive gloves and find a good basic glove that will allow the player to master the basics of catching a ball.

You'll also find glove oils out there, and these are designed to help break a glove in and promote a longer life for the leather. At the younger age groups, however, the best way to break a glove in

is repetition, along with placing a ball in the glove, and tying a string around the glove to hold it closed overnight. Over time, this should create flexibility that will allow the player to use the glove more easily.

Cleats: Having appropriate baseball shoes is also very important for young players. Cleats with rubber spikes (no metal spikes are allowed in MCPRD baseball) really provide the traction necessary for running bases on dirt and fielding the ball in the grass portion of the infield and in the outfield. Reputable shoe manufacturers produce shoes that are comfortable and durable enough for beginners. It is most important that they provide the comfort and support necessary to enjoy the game and the traction needed to run on both grass and dirt.

Cup/Pelvic Protective Equipment: Even though safety baseballs are used at younger ages, pelvic protective equipment is required for both boys and girls in all divisions. This equipment is available at almost all sporting goods stores and should run around \$20 to purchase.

Mouth guards: A mouth guard is a horseshoe-shaped, soft plastic device used to protect the teeth, lips, gums, and cheeks from injury. Several studies suggest that mouth guards also reduce the number of concussions by decreasing the force of impact. The American Dental Association and other sports dentistry groups recommend the use of mouth guards in all organized team sports where a mouth injury can occur – this includes baseball. These cost around \$10 and are available at virtually all sporting goods stores.

Baseball pants: The league will provide baseball pants for games as part of a players' uniform; however, parents may wish to purchase an additional pair for practices. These pants are typically made of a nylon blend, and they provide comfort and flexibility, as well as protection when sliding (more important at the older levels). A basic pair of youth baseball pants should cost around \$10, and these are available at virtually all sporting goods stores.

League Provided Equipment

In addition to the equipment each individual player needs to provide, the local recreation centers will also provide the following equipment for use in practices and games:

Uniforms: The local recreation centers will provide numbered uniform jerseys, pants, socks, and hats for each player.

Bat: Each local recreation center will provide a team bat that all players can use, and it will be the appropriate size and weight for their division. Players may also choose to provide their own bat as long as it meets league specifications. Representatives are available for questions on the types of bats that might be best for an individual player, as these costs can escalate to over \$250 depending on the model. In most cases, this isn't necessary, and officials should be able to guide you in finding an appropriate bat at a reasonable price.

Batting Helmet: Each local recreation center will also provide their s with four batting helmets, so that the batter and all potential baserunners have one available to them. Many players like to have their own helmets, and these are permissible as long as they meet league specifications. Air-brushing or painting on the helmets is also permissible subject to league guidelines and MCPRD

Youth Sports' mission and code of conduct. These can be purchased for \$20-\$30, with airbrushing costs probably in the neighborhood of an additional \$60-\$70.

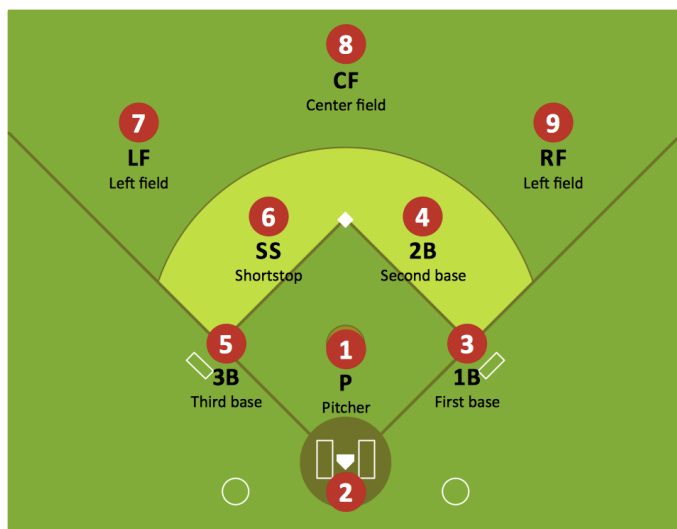
Catchers' Gear: In applicable divisions, the recreation centers will also provide standard catchers' gear and a catchers' glove (as needed) for team use based on the average size of the players. Players who specialize in catching may also elect to purchase and use their own equipment, as long as it meets league safety standards. Air brushing of masks in these cases is subject to the same guidelines relating to batting helmets.

Baseballs: The recreation centers also provide each team with one dozen practice baseballs applicable to each division. Game balls will be furnished by the league on game days. Players may also wish to purchase their own baseballs for individual use outside of practice, but it is typically not necessary for players to bring their own baseballs to practice.

Players Positions

Defensive Positioning

The defensive team fields nine players, and they are typically stationed as illustrated in the following diagram (although this is now less standard with the new baseball analytics and different "shifts" employed by major league teams). Please see the specific rules for your division as to the number of players and positioning requirements, as these vary among the divisions, with younger ages allowed to place more players on the field defensively in designated locations. A brief description of each of the positions listed is provided below.



Pitcher: This is perhaps the most important position in all of baseball, as the pitcher delivers the ball for the batter to attempt to hit. The more difficult it is for the batter to hit the ball, the more likely it is that he/she will make an “out.” At advanced levels and older ages, pitchers are able to put spin on the ball to make it curve in a number of ways, and also change its velocity to make it as difficult as possible for the batter to make good contact. Attempting to “spin” a baseball or make it “curve” at a younger age where a player is still growing and developing; however, can put significantly increased strain on a player’s arm and is strongly discouraged. The emphasis at younger ages especially, should therefore be on accuracy and on changing speeds through adjusting the players’ grip on the ball. This type of instruction is available through recreation staff at the scheduled skills clinic or on an individual basis as available.

At lower levels where batters hit off a tee or from a machine pitch, the pitcher still plays an important role, as a higher percentage of batted balls are hit to them. At these younger ages, the pitcher is typically the best fielder on the team and should be able to make an accurate throw to first base on a consistent (somewhat) basis.

Catcher: At the older levels, the catcher is probably the second most important position on the team, as he/she must be able to catch the pitches thrown by the pitcher. He/she must also have a strong arm and learn how to develop a “quick release” to throw out runners who may attempt to steal. He/she must also not be afraid of being hit by the ball, as this happens often with balls thrown in the dirt, or “fouled off” by the batter. It is important that the catcher trust his/her equipment to absorb most of the impact, and be able to handle a moderate amount of pain when he/she is hit with the ball (the protective cup is absolutely essential here – NEVER let a player catch without one!). At younger ages, the catcher (if the division has one) should be able to receive a throw in order to tag out a runner who may be attempting to score.

First baseman: The first baseman should be one of your best fielders, with the ability to catch balls thrown in various locations (in the dirt, high, to either side, etc.), as well as the ability to catch ground balls, line drives, and pop-ups. He/she should also be able to charge and field bunts and be the cut-off man in certain situations and make accurate throws to any base. Because of the way the baseball diamond is laid out, first base is the only infield position that is suitable for left-handers, especially at the older ages.

Second baseman: This player should also be one of your better fielders, especially on ground balls, which are common for this position. They should also be able to field thrown balls to record force outs and turn double plays at second base. This is especially true at the older levels, where the ideal second baseman is a solid fielder who has quick hands and quick feet and a strong enough arm to make a good throw from second base to first. At the younger ages the second baseman should be able to field ground balls and make accurate throws to first base – they don’t need a really strong arm, they just need to be able to field and make a basic throw to first. They should also be able to catch a thrown ball to record force outs at second base (double plays are highly unlikely at younger levels (anything 10 & under).

Shortstop: At the older levels, the short stop is probably your best overall fielder, as a majority of ground balls are hit in this direction, and a majority of throws from the outfield go to this player as well. In addition to being good at fielding all types of hit and thrown balls, the shortstop should have the same quick feet and quick release described above, but also a strong enough arm to make

longer throws required on the left side of the infield. Above all, your shortstop should be one of your most alert players and should know what to do with the ball when he/she receives it in a variety of situations. This is especially true at the younger levels, where the short stop will likely receive the majority of throws from the outfield and will need to know whether to throw to a particular base to get an out, or simply hold the ball to make the play “dead” according to division rules.

Third baseman: The third baseman should be another stronger fielder, with a strong enough arm to throw the ball all the way across the diamond to record ground outs at first base. Like the first baseman, they should also be able to charge and field bunts and serve as the cut-off man on certain balls hit to the outfield. At older ages, they should also have quick reflexes, as right-handed hitters that “turn” on the ball quickly hit many hard ground balls and line drives in this direction – that’s why it is sometimes called the “hot corner.” At younger levels, the third baseman should be a fielder who can catch the ball and knows enough to tag third base in force out situations, or tag the runner coming from second base if possible. Being able to throw across the diamond and recording outs at first base is definitely a “bonus” at this position.

Left fielder: The left fielder’s primary responsibilities are to field ground balls and fly balls hit in their direction and make accurate throws to the appropriate bases depending on the situation. They should also be alert enough to back up bases when balls are thrown in the infield to prevent or limit runners from advancing on overthrows. At older levels, your left fielder will probably have the weakest arm of all of your outfielders because of the proximity to third base. As discussed below, your stronger-armed outfielders will be in center and right fields. At younger levels, all of the outfield positions are probably the best positions for your weaker fielders. Fewer balls are hit to the outfield at these levels, and it is frankly safer for your more inexperienced players to be positioned here. They should still be taught to stay alert, however, and know where to throw the ball in the infield in various situations. Having a strong outfielder who can catch fly balls and throw to the appropriate bases is definitely a “plus” at the older age levels, and a real “bonus” in the younger divisions.

Center fielder: Like all outfield positions, the center fielders’ primary responsibilities are to field ground balls and fly balls hit in their direction and make accurate throws to the appropriate bases depending on the situation. They should also be alert enough to back up bases when balls are thrown in the infield to prevent or limit runners from advancing on overthrows. Because they are required to cover more ground than the left and right fielders, this player should be your fastest outfielder. He/she should also have a relatively stronger arm than your left fielder, since it is a longer throw from center field to third base, and even to home plate. The center fielder should also be a leader at the older levels, as he/she is the “captain of the outfield” and has first responsibility for balls hit in the gaps – either to call to make the play himself, or to signal for the left or right fielders to make the play. Again, at the younger levels, your weaker fielders and more inexperienced players are normally in the outfield; however, since more balls are hit to the middle of the field, your stronger inexperienced players would normally play here. (In divisions where more than three outfielders are allowed, your stronger players should be placed in the positions that cover the middle of the field.)

Right fielder: The right fielder has the same primary responsibilities listed above for the left and center fielders. At the older levels, this outfielder will typically have the strongest arm of the three

outfield positions, required to keep runners from potentially advancing from first base to third base on base hits or to throw them out when they attempt to do so. Again, at the younger levels, your weaker fielders and more inexperienced players are normally in the outfield; and this certainly applies to playing right field. They should still be taught to stay alert, however, and know where to throw the ball in the infield in various situations.

Batting Order

In youth baseball, and really in all baseball, your stronger players will typically bat at the top of the order, and your weaker players will bat near the bottom. The basic principle is that those at the top of the order will bat more often, so your strongest hitters should be placed there.

In age divisions where the entire line-up bats every inning (6-under), it is strongly encouraged that you continually shuffle your line-up so that players bat in all spots. The emphasis here should be on allowing everyone to have an enjoyable experience and changing the batting order allows for players to feel a sense of excitement and makes them happier and more attentive overall.

In older divisions where more strategy is involved, especially when stealing is allowed, the following skills are typically employed in setting a batting order:

Leadoff hitter: This is a player who is able to get on base in a variety of ways: base hits, walks, being hit by a pitch, etc. Typically, they make good contact, and strike out less frequently than other players. They put pressure on the defense with their speed, both in hitting ground balls and attempting to beat them out, and in stealing bases once they get on. In short, they are fast, they have a good eye to get walks, and they make good contact.

Second hitter: This is another player who makes good contact and handles the bat well. He/she is an effective “situational” hitter who can bunt to move runners over or hit the ball to the right side of the infield to move a runner from second base to third. Like the leadoff hitter, they are good at making contact, have a good eye to work counts and draw walks, and are usually fast enough to be a threat on the bases as well.

Third hitter: This is typically your best hitter in terms of overall batting average and in his/her ability to hit with power. This hitter’s job is to not only get on base, but to drive in the runners that are on base. Although they may strike out a bit more frequently than the top two hitters, they will also hit with above average to exceptional power. All-time legends such as Roberto Clemente, Ted Williams, Hank Aaron, Joe DiMaggio, and Babe Ruth all batted third through most of their careers.

Fourth Hitter: The fourth or “clean up” hitter is typically your best overall power hitter. The emphasis of this position is driving in runs and hitting home runs, and making contact and hitting for a higher average are sacrificed to make this happen.

Fifth Hitter: The emphasis here is still on power, but this hitter typically will have a lower average than your #3 hitter (above), and not have the same power as #4.

Sixth Hitter: This hitter is similar to your #5 hitter, but just not as strong as him/her. They will still have decent power and maybe a slightly lower batting average, but they are still a threat to do some damage.

Seventh Hitter: At this point, this hitter could have more of a power or contact emphasis, depending on who the player is. As you move down in your batting order, in general your weaker hitters are near the bottom, and this player could be a person with a lot of power who hits for a very low average, or a contact hitter who may be valued more for his defensive abilities than his offense.

Eighth Hitter: This is the second weakest hitter in your line-up, and resembles your #7 hitter, but just not with the same ability level. In the National League in professional baseball (where the pitcher is usually the worst hitter and bats ninth), managers like to place contact hitters with a good eye in this position to extend the inning for their pitcher to bat. (This makes it easier to score in the following inning.)

Ninth Hitter: This is typically the weakest hitter in your line-up and his/her batting ability will vary depending on skill set. There are players described in baseball as “all glove, no bat” and they typically play because of their defensive abilities, and bat at the bottom of the line-up.

Please keep in mind that these are all generalizations that are used to develop line-ups in higher-ability level, higher strategy games. As mentioned above, generally putting your better hitters at the top of your line-up and working your way down from there will work fine for 95% of the situations you’ll encounter. And if you’re not keeping score and everybody bats every inning, then mix it up and enjoy the game!

Basic Rules

Baseball may be one of the most complicated games to play and to officiate, and accurate rule interpretation is sometimes difficult to achieve at even the professional level. The complete rule book is available on line at http://mlb.mlb.com/mlb/official_info/official_rules/official_rules.jsp and it is recommended that a manager or coach be somewhat familiar with these ideas and concepts, especially at the older age levels. To account for the size, strength, and age of the players of various age groups, specific rule adjustments have been made for each division, and these are provided in your coaching information packet. Please be sure that you are very familiar with them, as they will have a direct impact on player positioning, runner advancement and dead ball situations, mandatory play rules, and other situations that arise during the game.

For the MCPRD youth baseball program, especially in the younger age groups, the following basic rules and situations will arise and cover roughly 95% things that arise during the game:

Batting and Player Advancement: When a batter hits a ball in fair territory, he or she will attempt to reach first base safely by arriving at the base before it is in the possession of a fielder touching the base. If successful, the batter may stop there and wait for the next batter to hit, or he/she may try to advance to second and/or any subsequent bases at their own risk.

Baserunners and advancement: When a ball is hit in fair territory by the batter, the base runner may also elect to advance to any subsequent bases in an attempt to score, or at least advance closer to home plate. Only one baserunner may occupy a base at any one time, so there are times when the runner on a base may be *forced* to advance when the batter or a baserunner behind him or her is forced to run (by the batter or another runner). If the runner is forced to run, he or she must attempt to get to the next base safely before it is in the possession of a fielder touching the base.

When a runner has made it all the way around the bases without getting put “out” by a fielder, this counts as a “point” or “run” for the offensive team.

League Age-Specific Rules: As mentioned above, there are significant age-specific rules that have been incorporated for each division to maintain a reasonable pace of play and take relative player skills and physical development into account. These are typically reflected in limitations of baserunner advancement, and specific definitions of what constitutes a “dead ball” that ends the play. As mentioned above, it is very important that coaches are familiar with these rules, as these issues will arise frequently during a game, and a solid understanding of them will prevent unnecessary confusion and limit misunderstandings and unproductive communication patterns.

Recording Outs: While outs can be recorded in numerous ways, there are five that are the most common in youth baseball:

1. **Strikeout:** A player is called out when he or she gets three strikes as a batter. Strikes are recorded when a player swings and misses at a pitch (or hits a foul ball with less than two strikes), or doesn’t swing at a ball deemed to pass through the strike zone as called by the umpire. Again, there are specific rules for what constitutes a strikeout in each age division, so make sure to consult these to determine how they are applied for the division you are coaching in.
2. **Ground-out:** The batter hits a ball that bounces on the ground and the defensive players field it and throw it to the first baseman, who catches it while touching the base before the runner arrives. (He/she may also tag the runner with the baseball before the runner gets to first base to record an out as well, as discussed below.)
3. **Force Play:** This is another type of ground-out where the defensive team fields the ball and throws it to a player touching a base that a runner is forced to advance to before the runner arrives there safely. All the defensive player must do is be in possession of the ball on the base before the runner arrives.
4. **Tag Out:** A runner may be tagged out by a fielder with the ball in his or her possession while the runner is not touching a base. This can occur in a number of cases, but typically happens when (1) runners attempt to take an extra base (or bases) on a hit ball, (2) when a runner attempts to advance to the next base when not forced to do so, or (3) when a runner overruns a base and is tagged while not in contact with the base.
5. **Fly Out:** If a fielder catches a batted ball before it hits the ground (the exception being a foul tip caught by the catcher), the batter is automatically out. In this case, runners are not forced to run since the batter is out, so they can safely stay on the base. If they do attempt to advance to the next base, they must wait on their current base until the ball is caught (actually touched) by the fielder – this is called “tagging up.” A runner may be called out if the defensive team gains position of the ball while touching the base the runner left without tagging up before the

runner returns to that base. This happens occasionally at the younger levels and can create some havoc when it does. Go with the flow and enjoy the confusion.




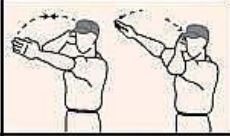
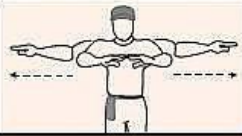




Other Rule “Gotcha’s”

From time to time, there are other issues that arise during a game, and they are good for you to know, and good to teach your players so they can avoid doing things that may lead to inadvertent outs or a loss of outs. Understanding these things can also save you a lot of anger and confusion if they happen during a game, and you’re unaware of them.

1. Obstruction: Occasionally a defensive player not in the act of fielding a ball will get in the way of a baserunner, and this is called *obstruction*. In this case, the umpire will award the runner the base he or she thinks they would have advanced to had this not occurred. To prevent this from happening, teach your players to stay out of the runners’ way when they are on defense, and not fielding the ball.
2. Interference: This occurs when a baserunner makes contact with a defensive player who is in the act of fielding the ball. When this happens, the runner is called out, so teach your baserunners to avoid fielders when they are attempting to field the ball. They either need to stop or go around the fielder, or they will be called out for *interference* if they get in the fielder’s way.
3. Fair vs. Foul Ball: A ball that bounces *before* it gets to first or third base must only travel over the base in fair territory to be considered a fair ball. Some balls are hit with spin, and start out in fair territory, but may wind up in foul territory somewhere in the outfield. Other balls may bounce in foul territory first but spin back into fair ground. To be considered fair, the ball must only be fair when it crosses first or third base in the judgment of the umpire, or if it stops in fair territory (including on the baseline) in the infield. On the other hand, a ball that is hit and doesn’t bounce until it passes first or third base, must land in fair territory to be considered a fair ball. Finally, in the event that there is a home run that is actually hit over the fence, it must only cross the fence in fair territory to be considered fair. The ultimate landing point is not taken into consideration in this case.
4. Two Runners on One Base: This is another situation that will arise from time to time with more comical results (depending on your perspective). The basic rule of thumb in this case is that the runner who is entitled to this base is safe, and the other runner is at risk of being tagged out. As an example, assume there are runners on first and second, and the batter gets a base hit to the outfield. If the runner on second stops at third, but the runner on first doesn’t see him/her and continues to third base as well, the runner who started on second is entitled to third base. The runner who started on first base would be out if he or she is tagged by the fielder. As a coach, defensively it’s good to tell your players to tag both runners and let the umpire tell you who is out. Offensively, this is good to know as well, so you can tell the appropriate runner to either advance or go back to avoid making an out, depending on the situation.

Umpire Signals

Here are some common symbols you will see the umpire make at various levels of play. You won't see them all, especially at the lower levels, but it is helpful to understand them to decipher the umpire's call, and properly instruct your players on things they may need to do as a result.

Baseball Signals			
			
Do Not Pitch	Play Ball	Time-Out, Foul Ball or Dead Ball	
			
Foul Tip	Fair Ball	Safe	
			
Strike or Out	Infield Fly	Count	Time Play

Do Not Pitch: The home plate umpire will hold up his right hand toward the pitcher, alerting him to not pitch to the hitter, until the signal to pitch is given. This is typically when the batter is not yet ready, or has requested time out that has been granted by the umpire.

Play Ball: This is the signal the umpire will give after a time-out to put the ball back in play. It's frequently given in conjunction with the "do not pitch" symbol above, as the umpire will motion when it is OK for the pitcher to deliver his next pitch.

Time Out, Foul Ball, or Dead Ball: This is the signal the umpire will give in all of these situations. When this signal is given, the ball is "dead" and no runners can advance or be thrown out. When making this symbol, the umpire will also verbally state "time" or "foul ball" to indicate that play is stopped and the ball is no longer "live" or in play. In younger divisions, you will see umpires make this symbol to call a "dead ball" based on modified rules designed to maintain a "productive"

pace of play. When this occurs, the ball is not placed back “in play” until the next batter hits the ball in fair territory.

Foul tip: The umpire will make this symbol (quickly brushing the fingers/palm of one hand against the back of the fingers of the other) when a ball is tipped by the batter and caught by the catcher. When this happens, the ball is still live and in play. Runners may advance at their own risk and be thrown out by the catcher as well. If this happens on the third strike, the batter is also out on strikes.

Fair Ball: When a ball is ruled fair by an umpire, he or she will extend the appropriate arm toward fair territory. He/she may also point toward fair territory in an animated fashion but will not say anything in this case. It’s important to understand this as a coach, so you can instruct your runners properly in a timely fashion, and not delay by asking the umpire for clarification.

Safe: The umpire will extend both arms when ruling a player safe at a base. This may occur on ground balls hit to the infield or plays attempting to make outs at any base. It is usually accompanied by a verbal “safe” call. As a coach, it’s important to tell your players not to leave a base when they see this sign or hear this call, or until they are called “out” by the umpire.

Strike or Out: The umpire will raise his right hand to indicate he/she has called a strike on a pitched ball, or an out in a base running play. This is usually accompanied by a verbal “out” or “strike” call as well.

Infield Fly: This rule is usually only in play at higher levels of youth baseball and occurs when a batter hits an infield fly with runners on first and second or with the bases loaded and less than two outs. If the umpire determines that the pop fly can reasonably be caught by an infielder, he will raise his hand and yell “Infield fly, batter is out.” By calling the batter out, the baserunners are not forced to run, and the defense is prevented from potentially making a double play by simply letting the ball drop. Most youth leagues incorporate this rule at the 10U or 12U level only because of the skill level of the defensive players.

Count: The umpire will display the count on his fingers, with the left hand indicating the number of balls and the right hand indicating the number of strikes on the batter. He/she will usually verbally announce the count in conjunction with giving it on his/her hands.

Time Play: This is a symbol that umpires use to communicate to one another which base they will cover in the event of a possible time play. This usually involves potential situations where the third out of an inning may be recorded via a tag, and the umpire may need to judge if a runner scores before the tag is made. With one umpire, you won’t see this call made, and it’s unlikely that you would see such a call at the lower divisions as well. One umpire is simply letting the other know what his/her position will be if this occurs.

Baseball Terms

The following are a list of commonly used baseball terms that you will likely encounter and find handy to understand as a coach, taken from the *Coaching Baseball for Dummies* book prepared by the NAYS:

At bat: When a player takes a turn hitting at the plate and doesn't record a base on balls or get hit by a pitch.

Bag: A reference to first, second, or third base.

Base on balls: A batter is awarded first base when the pitcher throws four balls (pitches that the umpire deems to be out of the strike zone) before throwing three strikes or inducing the batter into making contact. A base on balls is also known as a *walk*.

Base hit: When a batter hits a pitched ball into fair territory and reaches a base safely without the opposing team committing an error on the play.

Batting average: A figure calculated by dividing the number of base hits a batter has by his number of official at bats. Batting average is displayed as a number with three decimal places (for example 0.327).

Corner: A pitch that just barely enters the strike zone is said to be "on the corner," as in "that pitch was just on the inside corner."

Count: The number of balls and strikes on a hitter during an at-bat. When reciting the count, you say the number of balls before the number of strikes. For example, if a batter has one strike and two balls against him, the count is 2 and 1. A batter has a *full count* when the pitcher has thrown three balls and two strikes (3 and 2).

Cutoff man: A player, most often an infielder, who positions himself between an outfielder and the player occupying a base so that he can "cut off," or catch, a long throw and relay the ball to the intended base.

Double play: When a defense gets two players out on one play.

Error: When a defensive player makes a mistake, such as tossing a wild throw or misplaying a routine ground ball, that allows a batter to reach base safely or a base runner to advance.

Fielder's choice: When a defensive player chooses to attempt getting a base runner out rather than the batter, which allows the batter to reach base safely.

Foul ball: A batted ball that lands on the grass outside the foul lines or goes out of the field of play.

Gap: Also known as the *alleys*, the gaps are the areas of the outfield between the center fielder and the left fielder and between the center fielder and the right fielder.

Ground-rule double: This occurs when a batter hits a ball that lands in fair territory and bounces out of play, such as over a fence or into the stands, and the umpire awards the batter second base.

Intentional walk: Occurs when a pitcher purposely delivers four pitches well outside the strike zone to walk a batter. Coaches often call for an intentional walk when it's advantageous to the defense to face the next batter or create a different situation on the base paths.

In the hole: A batter who's due up to hit after the on-deck hitter is said to be in the hole.

Line drive: A ball hit sharply in the air, approximately four to eight feet off the ground.

Out of play: A ball hit (or thrown) beyond the fence or bordering foul territory is out of play.

Passed ball: A pitch that gets passed the catcher and rolls to the backstop, allowing the base runners to advance.

Pinch hitter: A player on the bench who enters the game to hit in place of a teammate.

Pinch runner: A player on the bench who enters the game to run in place of a baserunner.

Putout: When a defensive player makes a play that results in a batter or baserunner being called out.

Relay: When an infielder takes a throw from an outfielder and throws the ball to another base.

Run batted in: When a batter delivers a hit, or executes a sacrifice, that allows a runner to score.

Rundown: Occurs when a base runner gets caught by fielders between two bases, and the fielders try to "run him down" to make the out. A run-down is also called a *pickle*.

Sacrifice: When a batter records an out on purpose in order to advance a base runner. For example, a batter may hit a fly ball to the outfield with a runner on third base, which allows the runner to advance home after he tags up.

Stolen base: When a base runner swipes a base, usually by taking off for the next base after a pitch crosses the plate. (Rules vary widely for stolen bases; check your league's rules for specifics on stolen bases.)

Tag up: This refers to base runners advancing on a fly ball. In order to do so, they must touch the base they began on before attempting to advance to the next base.

Take: To *take* a pitch means to not swing at it.

Triple play: A rare occurrence when the defense gets three players out during one play.

SECTION 3

COACHING TIPS, **PRACTICES &** **DRILLS**

Coaching Children

Physical Growth and Development

Differences in physical maturation will affect young players' capability to develop athletic skills. Coaches should ensure that appropriate equipment is available for all individuals.

When coaching young children, coaches need to be aware that:

- Early developers often perform impressively but may be 'caught up' and overtaken by late developers during adolescence.
- Early or late physical development may cause emotional problems.

Mental Growth and Development

- Young players tend to look to coaches, teachers, parents and friends to find out more about the world and themselves.
- It is important that coaches help children attain a positive self-image by being POSITIVE, ENCOURAGING and SUPPORTIVE and encouraging a positive perception of the activities they are asked to undertake.
- Broader issues such as physical development, transferable skill development, social development and the development of self-confidence are all benefits of effective coaching.

Children and Exercise

An important part of helping young children cope with the physical demands of sports is rest. Practices should allow sufficient rest periods after bursts of activity. Early morning or late evening sessions are not ideal for younger players as they may reduce resistance to fatigue.

Coaches should note that:

- Children breathe more often than adults and are therefore more prone to dehydration – drinks should be available at all times during sessions. Children should be encouraged to drink a 'little and often' when involved in physical activity.
- Children are more susceptible to heat loss or gain and therefore should be appropriately dressed for the environment in which activity is taking place.
- Intensive training during growth spurts can lead to injury.
- Inappropriate forms of training that are based on adult principles will increase the risk of injury.

Teaching New Skills

When teaching a new skill or enhancing an existing one, the **IDEAL** sequence may be useful:

Introduce the skill.

Demonstrate or provide an appropriate 'technical model'.

Explain the key technical and organizational points.

Activity as individuals or groups practice.

Learning through further activity, demonstrations, explanations, and positive and corrective feedback.

Coaching Young People

Some useful pointers:

- Keep their interest – children have relatively short attention spans.
- Keep your talks brief and to the point – children can be bored easily.
- Keep any lines formed short or better yet, no lines at all, as possible.
- Progress at the appropriate pace for the learner – individuals learn at different speeds.
- Early activity brings enjoyment and maximum learning – activity is the key to holding interest.

Errors are a learning medium – everyone makes them and everyone can learn from them

Think of a child's brain as an elastic band – continue to provide them information slowly and they will grow. Providing too much information too quickly will overload them, and the growth is lost (the band snaps).

Roles & Responsibilities of Coaches

Responsibilities of a Coach to the League

Equipment

1. Maintain and care for issued equipment as if it were your own.
2. Insure that only approved equipment is used and that it is used properly.
3. Return all equipment promptly after the season ends.
4. Inform your recreation center staff immediately if there is missing or damaged equipment.

Certification

1. Ensure you are approved as an MCPRD volunteer through volunteer services.
2. Head coaches have been certified and that you retain certification in the National Youth Sports Coaches Association.
3. You are required to know the rules of the sport that you are coaching as well as any local bylaw adaptations that may exist.
4. You must attend all coaches' meetings that are scheduled.

Responsibilities to your players**Safety**

1. Supervise the physical environment of all playing areas.
2. Supervise the wearing and use of proper and approved equipment at all times.
3. Supervise the emotional and physical well-being of each player.

Morals and Morale

1. Teach respect for self; others, authority, and equipment.
2. Set a good example for players to follow.
3. Create positive attitudes.
4. Implement discipline during games and practices.
5. Abstain from use of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco prior to and during team events.
6. Do not use profanity or inappropriate language.

Fundamentals

1. Teach and demonstrate the skills of the game.
2. Teach and obey the rules of the game.
3. Help develop techniques to match each player's individual skill level.

Sportsmanship

1. Show respect toward others and authorities.

2. Teach fair play.
3. Encourage competitive spirit, yet de-emphasize the importance of winning.
4. Support team play.
5. Demonstrate self-control.
6. Conduct of parents of your players is your responsibility during the game.

As a coach, you will be called upon to do the following:

1. As you know, you have a lot to communicate. You'll communicate not only with your players and parents but also with the coaching staff, game officials, administrators, and others. Communicate in a positive way that demonstrates you have the best interest of the players at heart.
2. When teaching the fundamental skills of youth sports, keep in mind that they are games, and as such, you want to be sure that your players have fun. You can help all players be the best they can be by creating a fun yet productive practice environment.
3. Introduce the rules of the games and incorporate them into individual instruction. Many rules can be taught in practice but plan to review rules any time an opportunity naturally arises in practice.
4. Remember that the focus is not on winning at all costs but on coaching your kids to compete well, do their best, improve their skills and strive to win within the rules.
5. Helping your players to be fit means they can play the game safely and successfully. This may help your players to become fit on their own, understand the value of fitness, and enjoy training. Don't make your players do push-ups or run laps for punishment. Make it fun to get fit for the game and make it fun to play the game so that they will stay fit for a lifetime.
6. Character development includes learning, caring, being honest and respectful, and taking responsibility. These intangible qualities are no less important to teach than the skills of your sport. Teach these values to players by demonstrating and encouraging behaviors that express these values at all times.

The Coach During a Game

Games provide the opportunity for players to showcase what they have learned in practice. For players, focus shifts from learning and practicing to competing. Similarly, a coach's focus should shift from teaching skills to coaching players. Teaching and learning are still important; however, the focus should remain on performance, participation and having fun.

Many coaches focus on how they will coach only during the actual game, when instead preparations should begin well before the first play of the contest.

Before the Game

Creating a Line-Up

Depending on the age of your players, you may not need to focus too much on orchestrating the perfect line-up. With younger players the main goal is to give each player equal playing time. With older players at increasing skill levels, there are guidelines for putting together a tactical line-up.

Deciding Team Tactics

Team tactics do not need to be complex. For example:

- Have a safety in football to avoid the deep pass.
- Get the lead runner, hit your cut-off, and throw to the correct base in baseball and softball.

These are clear, concise and good tactics! Emphasis needs to be placed on teamwork and the role each player has, even when not involved in a play. As the team and players evolve, coaches can focus on specific tactics to improve performance and results.

Warm-up

Players need to prepare for a game both physically and mentally. The younger the player, the closer to game times they should arrive, so they stay focused and don't become too tired. Warm-ups should be consistent, as consistency breeds familiarity and familiarity breeds confidence.

Physical warm-ups should focus on stretches, brief games, drills or skill practice and range-of-motion exercises. Mental preparation can be as simple as reminding players of the skills they have been practicing and focusing their attention on their strengths and what they have been doing well.

A warm-up is used to excite the athlete before their game. This is a good time to build a competitive environment. A proper warm-up prepares the body for vigorous activity that an athlete is about to perform. Athletes perform warm-up for three purposes:

1] Enhance performance- the warm-up allows the body temperature to increase the blood flow to the working muscles that allows required nutrients to be used as energy, faster muscle contraction, and muscles to work more efficiently.

2] Prevent injury- The warm-up allows the body temperature to increase to reduce joint and muscle injuries.

3] Mental preparation- The warm-up allows the athlete to process the activities that is about to occur. Mental preparation can assist in improving drill technique, coordination of movements, and overcome discomfort of the workout.

Be Flexible!

With the best will in the world, coaches need to expect the unexpected! Always keep in mind that unexpected events may lead to game cancellation or postponement or players (or even you) being late or not arriving at all. Having plans already in place can help mitigate the effects of these unexpected events.

During the Game

Tactical Decisions

Coaches will always be called upon to make a variety of tactical decisions related to game strategies throughout a game.

- *Starting and Substituting Players*

When considering amounts of playing time for younger players, coaches are required by rules to provide equal playing time to their players (See **MUST PLAY Rule- page 11**). Coaches should also frequently rotate player positions, starters and substitutes for each child's personal growth. Coaches should always keep a record of where and how long each player has played.

- *Adjusting Team Tactics*

The flow of the game will tell coaches if they need to adjust the way the team is approaching a game. When making adjustments it is very important that the players have previously prepared for and have learned those adjustments in practice. Be careful not to overanalyze the situation and stress tactics too much, as this may take the fun out of the game.

- *Correcting Players' Errors*

Learning errors occur because players don't know how to correct a skill. Performance errors occur when players make mistakes in carrying out skills they already know. It is not always easy to tell which type of error your players are making. If a player makes a learning error, make a note of it and cover it at the next practice. Game time is not the time to teach or learn skills.

If players are making performance errors, this is often because they have a lapse in concentration or motivation, or they simply made a human error. A few words of encouragement about concentration may help. If you do correct a performance error during a game coaches should do so in a quiet, controlled and positive manner during a stoppage of play or when the player is on the bench. The player may be aware of the error they made, and more specifically why they made it, and may not appreciate any comments about their mistake.

Coach Behavior

A coach's behavior should focus on positive competition and having fun. Remember that game day is for the players – practice days are for the coaches:

- Be prepared and organized.
- Be calm, in control, and supportive of your players.

- Encourage players often but instruct sparingly during play. Players need to focus on performance, not instruction.
- If you do need to instruct, do so when you are both on the bench in an unobtrusive manner.
- Never yell at players for making a mistake.

Player Conduct

Coaches are responsible for keeping players under control. By setting a good example, setting team rules, rewarding good behavior and enforcing consequences for breaking team rules coaches go a long way to ensuring their players remain well behaved. Areas for particular attention are: player language, player behavior, and interactions with officials.

Player Welfare

Players can become anxious when they are uncertain whether they can meet the expectations of others or of themselves, especially when that expectation is important to them. When coaching during games, remember that the most important outcome of playing is building or enhancing player's self-worth and having fun

Opponents and Officials

Respect opponents and officials, period! Opponents provide opportunities for your team to test itself, improve and excel. Officials help provide a fair and safe experience for players and may even help them learn the game.

After the Game

Opponents and Officials

Firstly, join your team in congratulating the coaches and players of the opposition and thanking the officials.

Cool-down

A cool-down allows the body to return to its pre-exercise state and offers a time for stretching and injury analysis. It may also be a good time to have the after-game meeting. Cool-downs should be completed after every game.

Team Meeting

It is best to keep the outcome of the game in perspective and settle players' emotions, as you don't want them too high after a win or too low after a loss. Always take time to have a quick (less than 5 minutes) post-game meeting in a designated area away from distractions. Compliment and congratulate the team and tell them specifically what they did well, regardless of whether they won or lost. Shortcomings should not be confronted until the next practice session

Roles of the Officials/Scorers

Officials enforce the rules of the game. Decisions are usually indicated both by the use of hand signals and by vocalizing the call. The official scorers will be trained Recreation Assistant facility staff.

Safety

One of the official's main responsibilities is to provide for the players' safety during the game. Both you, the officials and MCPRD staff are working together to protect the players whenever possible. Don't hesitate to address an issue of safety with MCPRD staff on site when the need arises.

Challenging Calls

All decisions made by the officials are considered to be final. Only a player's age can be protested. If you are asking an official for more information or for further understanding, you should ask calmly and professionally, without raising your voice or questioning the official's skills. Once an official has responded to your question with an answer, you cannot continue to protest. If you continue your protest, raise your voice or use inappropriate language, you may be given a warning or even ejected from the game. Any ejections will result in further disciplinary action by MCPRD Youth Sports. Interrupting a game to argue with an official won't change the call and it sets a very poor example for your players.

Principles of Practice Organization

If you accept that the main function of a coach is to teach the game in a safe, fun environment, and that practicing is the main vehicle through which this teaching occurs, then it follows that practice planning is vital to your success as a coach. How well you conduct training sessions and prepare your players for competition will greatly affect not only your players' enjoyment and success throughout the season but also your own. The key to effective practice is good organization and attention to detail, so a little extra time spent planning will pay dividends in the long run.

Why have practices? Practice should promote:

- Learning: Involves a change. Something is done differently if it takes place.
- Opportunities to Practice and Revise: Basic skills are practiced repeatedly at all levels.
- Conditioning: Raise fitness levels – sport involves explosive activity and games can last a long time.
- Enjoyment: Coaches have to make practices varied and keep the participant interested in the practice.

Practice which is NOT planned can be:

- Repetitive
- Boring
- Chaotic
- Non-directional
- Lacking in progress
- Dangerous
- Waste of time, energy, money, etc.

What aspects do you need to consider when planning a practice?

- The participants.
- The weather, etc.
- Number of coaches, MCPRD approved assistants/helpers available.
- Number of players available.
- Type and amount of equipment required.
- Age of players.
- Physical condition of players.
- Availability and condition of playing field/facilities.
- Time available to practice.
- Your objectives.

Practice Principles

Remember the following principles when you are coaching, and also remember that it takes time to learn to be an effective coach!

- Maximum use of resources - players, coaches, equipment, facilities, time.
- Maximum activity - keep busy throughout practice.
- Effective instruction - relevant practice & positive feedback.
- Use of variety - keep them interested and challenged.
- Individuality - teach individuals to play together.
- Make it fun - add challenge and competition.

Assistant Coach

Assistant Coaches are also important in practice planning. Assistants should:

- Contribute to the practice plan.
- Be prepared for the parts of the practice that you assist with or deliver.
- Be able to describe, model and contextualize the skills you instruct.
- Be able to promote good practice and correct faults in participants.
- Be positive in your coaching and help your players to learn and enjoy the game.
- Contribute to post-activity evaluation.

Season Plans

Your season plan acts as a snapshot of the entire season. Before the first practice with your players, you should sit down and develop such a plan. To do so, simply write down each practice and game date on a calendar, then go back and number the practices. These practice numbers are the foundation of your season plan. Now you can work through the plan, moving from practice to practice, outlining line what you hope to achieve by noting the purpose of the practice, the main skills you will cover, and the activities you will use. This will assist you build upon the skills taught each practice.

While developing your season plan, keep in mind that you will want to incorporate a game approach into your practices. Using game-like activities better prepares the players, both physically and mentally, for the demands of the game.

Practice / Session Plans

Coaches rarely believe they have time to practice everything they want to cover, therefore practice plans help you organize your thoughts so you stay on track with your practice objectives and help you better visualize and prepare so you can run your practice effectively.

Your practice plans should be appropriate for the age group and skill level of the players you are coaching and should incorporate all the skills and concepts presented in that particular age group's season plan. To begin, each practice plan should note the practice objective, which is drawn from your season plan for the particular age group, and the equipment necessary to execute the specific practice.

Each practice plan should also include a warm-up and cool-down. Remember that during the cool-down, you should attend to any injuries suffered during practice and make sure the players drink plenty of water.

Your Practice / Session Plan

You need to have general information about each session, such as risks, players, times etc., as well as making sure you have thought about:

- Goals / objectives.
- Introduction and warm up.
- Main Content:
 - Conditioning elements.
 - Learning a skill.
 - Practicing skills.
 - Gaining knowledge about the game.
 - Practicing team strategies.
 - Competitive element / game.
- Cool down.
- Evaluation.

The session plan on the next page is an attempt to put on one page the various factors which need consideration in planning a practice or even part of a practice. They can be adapted for individual use.

Practice Plan Template

DATE/ TIME	STAFF	
VENUE	ACTIVITY AREA	
GROUP AGE	GROUP SIZE	ABILITY LEVEL
MEDICAL INFORMATION/ SPECIAL NEEDS		
EQUIPMENT REQUIRED Have you got your First Aid kit and do you have immediate access to a telephone?		
SESSION GOALS/ OBJECTIVES (may link to previous session)		
SESSION CONTENT		TIME
WARM UP		
MAIN EXERCISE/ ACTIVITY	COACHING/ OBSERVATION POINTS	
COOL DOWN		
PLAYER INFORMATION		
REVIEW/ EVALUATION		

Baseball Principles, Plans & Drills

6 & Under (Tee Ball)

Guiding Principles

When coaching at the youngest levels, skill development is very important; however, it will not occur without establishing the appropriate mental building blocks that facilitate this process. These building blocks that enable further learning and development focus on developing a love for the game and a mental outlook that makes this possible. Thus, it is essential that the points below are emphasized, re-emphasized, and incorporated into every practice and game situation.

Overcoming fear of the ball

This is probably the biggest obstacle for inexperienced players to overcome, and it requires the development and continual reinforcement of a proper mental approach to the game. First, players need to be aware that there will be times when they will get hit with the ball, and it will hurt for a little while. Be honest with them. Let them know it will happen and that it will hurt, but that the hurt will go away in a little while (this is especially true with the safety balls - the fear of getting hit is probably more traumatic than the pain actually experienced).

In conjunction with being honest about getting hit with the ball, players also overcome their fear of injury by wearing the appropriate protective gear. As described earlier, ensuring that all players wear a protective pelvic cup is of utmost importance in this regard. This is a key piece of protective equipment, and the importance of its use by **ALL** players cannot be overemphasized. As also mentioned above, the importance of having a glove that enables the players to catch the ball properly should be emphasized as well.

Second, players need to be taught that there are ways to keep from getting hit, and these need to be continually emphasized in every practice and every game. First, players need to be taught that the two most important things they have in baseball are their eyes. The old adage, “keep your eye on the ball” is especially true, and it needs to be emphasized and re-emphasized before every practice, every drill in practice, before every game, during every game, and after every game. When players get afraid and panic, they tend to close their eyes, and this is when they get hit, and this is when they become increasingly more afraid. Teach them to always look at the ball and use the two most important tools they have, their eyes, at all times.

Next, players need to be taught to have an aggressive mindset when playing baseball. Instead of trying to run or hide to keep from getting hit, they need to use their eyes and use their equipment to “go after” the baseball. As a result, a player’s glove becomes a *tool* that enables him/her to catch the ball. Similarly, the bat is also a *tool* that enables a player to hit the ball when it is pitched (or placed on the tee).

In short, instead of fearing the ball when it is coming toward them, players should be taught to use their eyes and their *tools* to go after it effectively. This aggressive attitude is important in all sports

but is especially crucial in baseball in overcoming this fear. Once this mindset is established, you can then start to teach your players the proper way to use their equipment when they play.

Encouraging a love for baseball (and sports in general)

When children first start to play baseball, especially when they are 5 & 6 years old, many will find the basic skills are difficult to master at this young age. Don't be surprised if some are still unable to catch the ball, or hit a pitched ball with a bat, even at the end of the season. Kids develop at different rates at different ages, and so at this stage it is most important to teach them to love the game. Once you do this, players will be able to develop at whatever pace they are capable. There are two basic ways to help young players develop a love for baseball and sports in general.

First, it is impossible to over utilize the tool of positive reinforcement. Every time somebody demonstrates the ability to perform a new skill, or even attempts to develop a skill, be there with praise for either the accomplishment or the effort. In 6U baseball there is no limit to the number of High 5's or fist bumps that can be given, and encouraging every effort and result is highly encouraged.

Second, as mentioned in the overall guidelines for coaching children, do everything you can to keep the teaching (talking) short and the lines for drills as short as possible. Kids love to stay active, and so it is vital to not only keep things positive, but keep things moving as much as possible. Hand in hand with this, if you can make a drill into a game, it increases enjoyment and awareness tremendously. There are a number of creative ways to do this, and we'll highlight a few as we get into more detail in the following sections. In general, stick with just the basics in team-oriented drills, and deal with those who are either well beyond or well short of the basic skills off to the side in one-on-one types of situations that still allow for overall flow in the practice.

Another big way to keep things moving is to get parental involvement as certified volunteer assistant coaches. It is very, very difficult to have one coach keep 12 young players engaged, but it is quite possible if you have three adults working with four players apiece. This is especially true if you have three adults who are excited to be there, and quick with positive reinforcement for all players. This type of environment is conducive for everyone to have a good time and develops a love for the game that could make a difference in a player continuing to play sports as they grow older.

Getting Started/Initial Practice

With the proper building blocks in place, it is important to have a practice structure that incorporates these principles with basic skill development. Your first practices will likely require a little more talking than normal as you explain things for the first time, however, even then you should attempt to keep it short to allow for more "doing" than "listening." Some players may have little to no understanding of how baseball is actually played, so your initial practices will have to have time dedicated to elementary concepts such as:

- The general idea of hitting the ball with the bat and touching all the bases to score a run (hence the name "base" ball).

- The layout of the bases and the order in which a player runs (first, second, third, home) to score a run.
- The concept of fair and foul territory.
- The idea of defensive positions and the concept of getting “outs” and how this is done.

If players don’t quite have it down after listening to you the first time, you can let them try the skill, and then help them with specifics of what they still need to do as they actually do the drill for the first time. After a number of repetitions, most players should show improvement in their ability to develop the skill, although some will do better than others (especially at this young age). Over time, players will increase in this understanding, and this can be re-emphasized through the drills that become part of the basic practice structure, which is described below.

Practice Structure

At the 6U level, the core practice structure should emphasize the very basic individual components of baseball, and then have a time where these are incorporated into a practical baseball team situation. With that in mind, assuming you have about 60 minutes, your practices could probably be structured along the following basic lines; however, these time allocations and instruction can be adjusted accordingly based on the actual time available:

- 15 minutes- warm up & play catch (see instructions below) (water break)
- 30 minutes- individual stations (Ideally break the kids into 3 groups of 4 and have a coach work with them at each station for 10 minutes or so. Take a water break after the second rotation and after you’re done with all stations)
 - Throwing/catching, including fielding ground balls
 - Hitting (Tee and pitches)
 - Running.
- 10 minutes- team concept
 - Putting fielders in positions, having coaches hit and kids run. Have defensive players learn what to do with the ball. Move the kids around to different positions. Let them all run, have them all figure out what to do if the ball is hit to them. Teach them to be ready, etc.
 - We’ll discuss in more detail at the end of the section.
- 5 minutes- end the practice with something fun that they will remember.

Instructional Techniques

As you begin working with players at this young age, there are a few core principles that are helpful to keep in mind. These include:

- Eyes and aggressive attitude: Continually emphasize that the eyes are the two most important things in baseball, and that the best way to play is to be aggressive and to go after the ball with their *tools* (their glove and their bat).
- Positive reinforcement: You can’t overdo it in this area.

- Focus on individual development: Remember that each player will develop at a different pace – some will learn very quickly, and others may struggle with basic concepts the entire season. Try to tailor your instruction to each based on what they are physically able to accomplish and celebrate growth or attempted growth for all according to their abilities.
- Keep it simple: Players at this age will only be able to grasp one or two concepts at a time, so don't throw too much at them all at once. Work on one aspect of a skill first, and once they start to master that area, add more to it as players are able to handle it. Again, understanding what each player is capable of doing is the key to providing the appropriate level of instruction for each.
- Keep it fun: If the players on your team enjoy themselves so much that they come back next year, consider that a successful season. At this age, the goal is to develop a love for the sport, and this is best done through positive reinforcement and a sense of accomplishment and having a good time while participating. There is plenty of time for wins and losses as players get older and more skilled, so a focus on development and enjoyment at this level can't be overemphasized.

Basic Skills Training

With the structure and coaching techniques described above in mind, here are some basic drills that you can incorporate in the various stages of practice outlined above.

Warm up and playing catch (15 minutes)

Begin practice with stretching and some light aerobic exercises (like jumping jacks and a short run), then start them off with basic catching and throwing. This is where it is very important to have at least two assistant coaches who can assist in this process. These basic skills are very difficult for most beginning players to master, so having players throw to one another – especially in the early stages of the season – can be very unproductive. Having one coach/adult play catch with 2-4 players is much more beneficial and will help players develop these skills much more quickly. The following are basic principles to follow in teaching players how to catch properly.

- First, give a very general overview of the basic positions for the player's glove for fielding throws that come toward you at different places. These would be:
 - Above-the-belt, glove side: glove up. (Area 1)
 - Above-the-belt, opposite side: Move glove across body and catch with backhand. (Area 2)
 - Below-the-belt, glove side: Turn hand around so that glove is down. (Area 3)
 - Below-the-belt, opposite side: Move glove across body and turn down. (Area 4)
- Have them hold their gloves in front of them as a target, and so they are ready to go after the ball with it when it comes.
- Then stress the importance of watching the ball all the way (EYES) and going after it with their glove (one of their *tools*) and covering it with their bare hand when it is caught. (This will keep the ball from escaping, and also help them later with developing a quick release.)
- Have the coach then make every throw to the same area, starting with area 1, until they master this skill. (It may take some players an entire season to do this, so again, focus on individual development.) Once different players get an area down, the coach can start throwing to the next area so the player can develop this skill as well. Over time, players

will develop the ability to catch the ball wherever it is thrown, but this is best learned by teaching them a little bit at a time until they are better able to judge where the ball is going and adjust their glove accordingly.

After a player catches the ball, the next thing he/she is going to do is throw it back to the coach. Again, until two players are able to handle both throwing and catching with reasonable skill, it is still best to have the players throw the ball back to the coach. The following basics of throwing are concepts that can be taught to younger players, with emphasis on individual instruction based on each one's ability:

- Have the players position their feet with the foot opposite the throwing hand ahead of the other, about shoulder-width apart. They should then angle them about 45 degrees to the right (or left if left-handed) of target so that the "off" shoulder is lined up with target. You can even teach them to point their glove at their target to give them an idea of where to line up. (Too many kids try to throw from an "open" position facing their target, and this can lead to a sore arm and lack of distance/velocity on their throws. The goal of the feet positioning gets them lined up to use the strength of their entire body in making a throw.)
- Bring throwing hand up and back (like they are reaching for something behind them – like picking an apple from a tree) while starting their step toward their target.
- Teach them to hide the name on their shirt until they are ready to let go of the ball. This will keep them "closed" until the proper time and allow them to throw the ball further without damaging their arm.
- When their foot hits the ground, it should be pointed at the target and the arm should be back and above the shoulder.
- The player should then think about "throwing their stomach at the ball" as their arm comes forward and the ball is released. This will allow them to turn the hips and "throw with their body" instead of just the strength of their arm. It keeps everything a single motion, improving distance, accuracy, and reducing risk of injury.
- The player should then "follow through" with the arm after the throw is made, with the "gooseneck" position of the wrist (the hand coming down over where the ball was), reaching all of the way to the ground for exaggeration.
- Above all else, have them remember that the eyes are the two most important things in baseball, and these should remain focused on the target *at all times*. The body will go where the eyes are focused when everything is lined up properly and the proper timing is developed.
- Again, teach this one step at a time. Getting them lined up properly and keeping their eyes on the target are the two most important steps. Add the others as your players are able to incorporate these skills. Some may never be able to do so, or to do so at a high level, and that's OK. Just help them do the best they can at the stage of development they are at.

Also, since catching and throwing come up in more advanced situations (like trying to get outs in the infield, etc.), use all of these situations as teaching times for these basic principles as well. Help your players develop these skills in warmups and drills, then encourage them to use them when they get into game situations. Positively reinforce every time they do this.

Station Instruction (30 minutes)

This 30-minute section of the practice is ideally accomplished with three coaches, breaking up your team into 3 groups of 3-4 players (depending on who shows up), and working with them for 10 minutes at a time at the core skills mentioned above: (1) catching/throwing, (2) batting, and (3) running. As the season progresses, you should be able to judge which players have relatively similar skill levels, and you may choose to put players in groups that align with these levels. This will allow you to tailor instruction to the different skill levels so that all can take a step forward from where they are currently at in terms of ability. This makes it more enjoyable and rewarding for everyone. With that in mind, let's take a look at what these station drills might include:

Catching/Throwing

For beginner groups, for example, your fielding/throwing station could consist of the basic catching/throwing drills listed above. You can also probably safely incorporate fielding ground balls, as follows:

- Start with the proper stance. Players should have bent knees, with their butt down (like they're sitting in an imaginary chair), with the tip of glove touching the ground.
- Hold the ball up and have your players shout "down" and assume the proper stance. As you lower the ball, have the players verbally shout "creep" and have them take a step forward with both feet, and resume the "down" position.
- As they attempt to field the ball, remind them again of the two most important things in baseball - their eyes. Have them aggressively approach, or attack, the ball, and reinforce the attitude as described above as cornerstone philosophy in baseball.
- Have them keep the glove down as they move forward and adjust as needed using your eyes. Once the ball is in their glove, have them cover it with their bare hand so the ball doesn't bounce out, or escape. This will also allow them to develop a quicker release as they get older and more skilled.
- As they catch the ball, have them turn their body to point their shoulder to throw, then throw the ball to your target.

As players become more advanced, you can position players at second base or short stop and have them make a throw to the first baseman (a coach or a player who can catch). You can also have them work the drill with their bare hands, rolling a ball slowly, so they get in the habit of actually feeling the ball with their glove hand and covering it with their throwing hand. As players get even more advanced, you can have them field the ball with their left and right feet hitting the ground one right after the other, promoting a quicker release once they catch it.

Again, by grouping your players according to relative skills, you can better build each players' abilities at the pace they are capable of. If you can get creative and make a game out of your drill that's even better. For example, a player gets three points for catching a ball, or one point for stopping it, and another 2 points for an accurate throw. Divide them into two teams and play a game up to 30 or 35 points to keep their interest. (This can be done in stations, or as a group at the end of the practice. (Always have them say "down" and "creep" as they assume the ready position and then field the ball.)

Hitting

This skill is probably the most difficult to master, as hitting a baseball is simply not an easy thing to do. As a result, instruction in this area should be kept as simple as possible, adjusted to the players' ability level. It should also be very *incremental* or done one step at a time. Don't try to throw everything at a player all at once. Focus on core foundations first, then build on these as players are able to handle them. In tee-ball, a majority of the players will likely not get beyond the foundational basics, so continue to work on these and celebrate successes and growth as they occur. Remember to always be encouraging and look to build a love for the game above everything else.

The sections below describe hitting drills with a coach softly throwing the ball to the players. Even though this is Tee-ball, MCPRD is promoting pitching to players prior to them hitting off the tee (3 pitches) starting with the third game of the season, as a means of encouraging development and giving players the opportunity to make contact with a pitch. This is probably the most fun in baseball and provides a tremendous sense of accomplishment. It also prevents boredom in more advanced players, while still allowing all to hit off the tee if necessary. With that in mind, the instruction provided below can still be easily adapted to placing the ball off of the tee as well.

- At the youngest ages, hitting is really all about attitude, and promoting an aggressive mentality. Teach them first and foremost to keep their eyes on the ball at all times (the eyes are the two most important things they use in baseball). Next, teach them to "go after" any pitch that they can reach with their *tool* (the bat). Your goal as a coach is to turn fear into confidence. Applaud them anytime they make an effort to hit the ball, and every time they make any form of contact.
- At the basic level of teaching hitting, there are only a couple of concepts that the players will be able to initially understand. They need to be taught how to properly hold the bat. If they are right-handed, then the left hand is on the bottom of the bat, and the right hand is on the top. They are switched if the batter is left-handed. Watch if the player has difficulty swinging the bat and teach them to "choke up" (or move their hands higher up on the handle) as necessary to make it easier for them to do so. They can also be taught to point their shoulder at the pitcher (like when they are throwing the ball), and above all, they need to be taught to go after the ball - if they can reach it hit it.
- As they begin to track the ball and start to make contact consistently, then advance to improved techniques for hitting the ball farther for those who are ready for this type of instruction. Instead of just making contact, they are now trying to hit the ball farther and harder. Now you can give them instruction on how to do this as they are able to handle it (remember to stay incremental in the steps described below and initiate them one at a time as players are able to incorporate them).
- Align their feet so they are facing home plate, shoulder-width apart, so that they can reach their bat across the plate comfortably when they bend over. Have them relax and bend their knees a little bit so they're comfortable.
- Have them put their hands back at about their back shoulder and just below shoulder height. Have them take a nice deep breath to stay relaxed as well.

- As the pitcher starts coming toward them, have them start to load up, or bring their bat back slightly so they are ready to come forward as the ball comes to them.
- As the ball is released, have them start to move forward and go after the ball when it comes to them. In doing this, ideally the bottom hand pulls the bat, and it is not a rounded swing. The goal is to be quick to the ball. Likewise, the top hand follows causing wrists to "flick." The last thing again is that they should "throw their stomach at the ball" or to "squish a bug" with their back foot, which is the best way to teach hip rotation through the swing.
- Emphasize that swinging hard isn't necessary, but what is essential is the two most important things they have - their eyes. Have them make sure they see the ball the whole way to the bat, and actually watch the bat hit the ball. Over time, they will learn to keep their swing "smooth" or under control so they can keep their eyes on the ball effectively.
- Also, as they begin to progress and make consistent contact, you can start to teach them about the strike zone and making the decision on whether or not they should swing at a pitch. Teach them that they should only swing at balls that are within the strike zone, and they should let everything else go by without swinging. You can then teach them that this zone is above home plate, above their knees, and just below where they hold the bat (just below their shoulders). Teach them to assume that every pitch is in the strike zone until they can see that it's not. Therefore, they should "load up" on every pitch, and take a step forward as the ball is released. If they use their eyes to determine the pitch is out of the zone, they don't continue with their swing and don't bring the bat to the ball. Also, if they have any doubt as to whether the ball is in the zone, have them swing the bat.
- Don't worry too much about how their weight should shift or the importance of staying back as long as possible. These are things they will learn as they get older. For now, just get them in the habit of loading up and going after the ball aggressively with their eyes focused on the ball.

Base Running

Start with the very basics of which base is first base, which is second, and which is third. Tell them that the goal in baseball, or the way to score a point or a run, is to touch all of the bases without getting out. The most common ways of getting out are to be tagged by a fielder with the ball, or to have the fielder touch the base they are running toward with the ball in his or her hand before they get there. To keep this from happening, you need to emphasize that your players do two things: (1) get from one base to another as quickly as they can, and (2) once they get to that base stay on it, unless the coach tells them to keep going to the next base.

As for specific drills you can use to reinforce these concepts during station time, the following may be helpful ideas you can incorporate into your practice format:

- Have players start at home plate and advance from base to base in the proper order, shouting the name of the base they are at when they touch it with their foot (first base, second base, third base, home...). Kids love to run, and so even doing this to gain a basic understanding of how to run the bases will be fun for them. You can

next incorporate swinging a bat at home plate, and maybe even hitting a ball off a tee before they run as part of this drill. This will also allow you to teach your players to drop the bat after they swing it, as some will be so excited that they will inadvertently throw it to get to first base as quickly as possible. (Setting the bat down and not throwing it should be emphasized anytime you work on hitting and running, as this is probably the most dangerous aspect of tee-ball.)

- During this time, you can also teach your players the concept of the base being a “safe” place for them to stand, and that they cannot be tagged out as long as they stay on the base. To reinforce this, use drills where they run as fast as they can from one base to the next, but make sure they stop on the base and stay there and don’t overrun it to keep from getting tagged out.
- You can also teach them the concept that there is one base that they can overrun (after touching it) and still be safe and that is first base. But they can only do this (1) when they hit the ball, and (2) when they turn into foul territory (remember this basic instruction from above). To emphasize these points have them hit an imaginary ball (or a real one) and run to first as fast as they can. Teach them not to stop on the base, but to “run through” it at the coach’s instruction. Teach them that running through the base means to step on it and slow down after you touch it, then turn toward foul territory. Keep in mind that teaching this concept will take longer than you think, but it will be fun for them to accomplish. Most of all, in teaching them this concept, teach them the principle of listening to their base coaches when they are running. Get your coaches in the habit of providing clear verbal instruction, and your players in the habit of listening to your coaches. This is essential in all of your baserunning drills.
- Put your players in situations where they need to listen to their coaches. Have them hit an imaginary ball and run to first base and have the coach either tell them to “run through” or go to second base. Mix it up so that your players get used to listening to their coaches and develop the ability to do this during the game. Also, put players on second base, and pretend a ball is hit. Have your third base coach tell them to go to third and stop, or score, or stay at second. Again, mix it up and train your players to listen to their coach.

Team Concept/Group Instruction (15 minutes)

This portion of practice is your opportunity to simulate some type of game situation that they will encounter when they actually play. There are numerous possibilities that you can incorporate during this time but try to use it reinforce some basic situations that happen consistently.

Game Simulations

Station your players in the infield and have a couple in the outfield with four serving as base runners. Hit ground balls and see if your infielders can record an out at first base. If they can’t get the out, have the runner either stay at first or advance to second, depending on the play. Teach your players in the field what they should do with the ball based on where these runners are at, then strategically hit balls that teach your players which plays to make, and how to make them. For example, if a runner is on first, hit a ground ball to your short stop and see if he/she can record a force out at second base. (This will reinforce

the concept of force outs and teach players the easiest ways to get runners out.) Likewise, with runners on first and second, hit a ground ball to third base and have your third baseman record a force out there (this happens frequently in tee ball). Hit balls to your outfielders and teach them to throw it to one of your infielders. Teach your infielders to either try to get runners out or hold the ball up in the infield (depending on what the coach tells them to do) to make the play “dead.” Get creative when you do this and incorporate situations that came up in your previous game, so players learn what to do when these things happen.

Baserunning Simulations

Instead of focusing on team defense, focus on just baserunning. Have your players swing a bat (and drop it – don’t throw it!) and run to first. Teach them to either “run through” or go to second, etc. Keep the runner there and have the next player in line take their turn. Have them listen to their base coaches so they get in the habit of doing that. Have your coaches do crazy things like tell them to go then to get back then to go again. These things happen in a game when players attempt to make plays or throw the ball away, or catch a pop fly, etc. The most important habit a player can develop is to listen to their base coach, so these running drills are fun for the kids, and good training for them and your base coaches.

Something fun to finish it off

At the end of practice, finish it with something that is fun for all players. Some type of running activity or relay race that incorporates some type of baseball situation is usually a good option, as it reinforces something in the game, and allows players to exert a final burst of energy before heading home. Whatever you choose, always end the practice with a team cheer, and try to send everybody away in as upbeat a mood as possible.

8 & Under (Machine Pitch)

At this age, the number one goal is still to promote a love for the game and for sports in general; therefore, the environment should still consist of positive reinforcement and individual player development. You will also probably also have a mix of new players who have never participated before along with those who have one or two years of tee ball under their belt. Therefore, being sensitive to the abilities of each and tailoring instruction to them as appropriate is still an important consideration within this age group. As a result, much of the core instruction provided above for the **6 and under** group still applies; however, you will have some players who will be able to move to more detailed aspects of specific skills. Knowing what your players can handle will be a key to helping them develop to the extent possible at this age.

Practice Structure

At the 8U level, the core practice structure should still emphasize the very basic individual components of baseball, and then have a time where these are incorporated into a practical baseball team situation. With that in mind, assuming you have about 90 minutes, your practices could probably be structured along the following basic lines. You can adjust the time allocations and instruction accordingly depending on the practice time available.

- 15 minutes- warm up & play catch (see instructions below) (water break)
- 30 minutes- individual stations (Ideally break the kids into 3 groups of 4 and have a coach work with them at each station for 10 minutes or so. Take a water break after the second rotation and after you're done with all stations)
 - Fielding/throwing
 - Hitting (soft toss/whiffle balls)
- 20 minutes- team concept
 - Putting fielders in positions, having coaches hit and players run. Have defense learn what to do with the ball. Move the kids around to different positions. Let them all run, have them all figure out what to do if the ball is hit to them. Teach them to be ready, etc.
 - We'll discuss in more detail at the end of the section.
- 15-20 minute- team batting/fielding practice
- 5-10 minutes- practice close-out, something fun.

Instructional Techniques

The same techniques employed in working with 6U players should still be used in working with the 8U age group as well. These are summarized again below as a reminder:

- Eyes and aggressive attitude: Continually emphasize that the eyes are the two most important things in baseball, and that the best way to play is to be aggressive and to go after the ball with their *tools* (their glove and their bat).
- Positive reinforcement: You can't overdo it in this area.
- Focus on individual development: Tailor your instruction to each player based on what they are physically able to accomplish and celebrate growth or attempted growth for all according to their abilities.
- Keep it simple: Players at this age will only be able to grasp one or two concepts at a time, so don't throw too much at them all at once. Think incremental growth, and not immediate development in all aspects of a skill.
- Keep it fun: If the players on your team enjoy themselves so much that they come back next year, consider that a successful season. Again, there is plenty of time to be competitive as players get older, so try to emphasize a fun, learning environment that is positive and provides a sense of achievement.

Basic Skills Training

With the structure and coaching techniques described above in mind, here are some basic drills that you can incorporate in the various stages of practice outlined above.

Warm up and playing catch (15 minutes)

Starting practice off with stretching and some light aerobic exercises (like jumping jacks and a short run), then start them off with basic catching and throwing. This is where it is very important to have at least two assistant coaches who can assist in this process. Hopefully at this age, most players will have the ability to play catch with one another, but you may need a coach to work

with a group of players to teach this basic skill as outlined above. Gauge this portion of practice with the ability level of your players.

Assuming most are able to play catch, you can also add basic fielding of ground balls at this level. If you have two assistant coaches, you can group your players into three groups of four, and roll ground balls to them to field bare-handed as described above. After each player receives five throws, have them put their gloves on and back them up to the baseline between 2nd and 3rd base and field five thrown ground balls. Have them shout “down” and “creep” before each throw, so they assume the proper stance and are anticipating the ball being hit (thrown in this case) to them.

If you have time, and your players have the ability, you can then break them into four groups and position them at each base (three at each base). Have them throw the ball around the horn once or twice in each direction. Teach them to have their bare hand near their glove when catching the throw so they can develop a quick release and teach them to pivot quickly to get their body properly lined up when they throw. (This is particularly important when throwing in reverse order, as right-handers will need to shift their bodies to make an accurate throw in this direction.)

Station Instruction (30 minutes)

This 30-minute section of the practice is the primary focal point for instruction in fundamentals, and is ideally accomplished with three coaches, breaking up your team into 3 groups of 3-4 players (depending on who shows up), and working with them for 10 minutes at a time at the core skills mentioned above: (1) fielding/throwing – ground balls, (2) fielding/throwing – pop flies; and (3) batting. (Baserunning can typically be addressed as part of the team simulation and does not need the same emphasis as it did in tee-ball, especially with no stealing). Again, grouping players according to their ability level or possible positions will allow you to tailor these sessions differently for individual groups. With that in mind, let’s take a look at what these station drills might include:

Fielding/throwing – ground balls: At this age, you should still focus on fundamentals and simply hit ground balls to your players and have them field them. They need to remember their eyes, be in the proper stance (down), and anticipate the ball coming to them (“creep”). After simply fielding a few, line them up at the infield positions and have them throw to first base. You can even work on getting force outs at second or third base as the season progresses and depending on the skill level of the group. For a group of mainly outfielders, you can work on catching ground balls at the outfield distance and hitting a cutoff man stationed between the coach and the fielder to develop this mindset and skill set.

Fielding/throwing – pop flies: At this age, some of your advanced players will be able to grasp this skill easily, while most others will struggle. Even with the safety ball, there is a possibility of injury if a player is hit in the face with one, so segregating groups by ability is a really good idea for these drills. For players with average to below-average ability, consider using tennis balls and a tennis racket to hit pop flies, and help the players develop the ability to judge where a ball is going and how to position themselves underneath it.

Players should initially be taught to catch the ball with their glove above their head directly in front of them. They should also be taught to either get behind or stay behind the ball and

try to catch it directly in front of them, using their bare hand to cover the ball so it doesn't bounce out of the glove. As they get more advanced in their skill level, they can be taught to catch the ball above on the side of the throwing arm for a quicker release and can be taught to catch the ball while moving forward so they can make a stronger throw. At this age, however, catching any kind of a pop fly is a real bonus, so emphasis on judgment and getting underneath the ball as quickly as possible will probably consume most, if not all, of your instructional time in this area of the game.

Batting

Station work batting practice should be done using either whiffle balls or by doing soft toss into an appropriate soft toss screen using the practice baseballs (safety balls). At this age, most players should be able to demonstrate the ability to at least hold their hands in the proper order (left on bottom for right-handed hitters, etc.) and hold them together on the bat. They should also be able to hold the bat slightly in front of their back shoulder (the right shoulder for right-handed hitters) about even with the top of their stomach. Beyond that, instruction should focus on timing, or helping players to merely get the bat to the ball at the proper time.

To do this using whiffle balls, the coach should stand about 20 feet away from the player and emphasize "loading up" (bring the hands back and shifting the weight back slightly) as the pitcher starts coming toward them. The coach should gauge the skill level of the player and even tell them to "load up" at proper time for them. As the coach releases the pitch, the player should be taught to start moving toward the pitch and look to hit the ball as it approaches them at, or just in front of, home plate.

Again, above everything else, emphasize that the eyes are the two most important things in baseball, and get the players to focus on watching the ball the entire way, and even seeing the bat hit it. To further develop this skill, you can use golf ball-sized whiffle balls to get the players in the habit of really focusing on watching the ball the whole way to the bat.

The same instructional techniques can be used with a soft toss screen as well. Instead of the pitcher starting his motion, however, the coach can hold the ball up and state, "load up" then have the player start moving forward as the coach releases the ball. To further emphasize using their eyes above everything else, consider using tennis balls that have been numbered from 1-6 or 1-9, and have the players shout which number on the ball they hit when they swung the bat.

Timing and watching the ball must come first, and other skills can be added as they start to get these core components down. Depending on the individual, you can work with players on more advanced skills such as getting the hands to the ball quickly, keeping the weight back and "throwing their stomach at the ball" (hip turn) to hit the ball further. You will probably have 1-3 players who will be able to handle this advanced instruction – others will stay at the basic level for the entire season.

In this station, you should be able to have each player take roughly 25 swings in a short period of time, working on basic instruction as you see players accomplishing or not

accomplishing specific skills. Continue to work with them and assist as needed with the understanding that some players may still not have the physical ability to do certain things. At the basic level, continue to emphasize timing and watching the ball, then go from there depending on the player.

Team Concept (20 minutes)

This 20-minute period should be used to work on situations that you anticipate will occur during the game or occurred during a recent game and weren't handled well by your players. In this section of practice, there are a number of situations you can work on, and the following are some examples:

Game Simulations

Station your players in the infield and outfield and have the remaining players and/or coaches run the bases while a coach hits the ball to different players and positions, as described in the 6U level above. Really emphasize that every player on the field has something to do during the play, and each player should know what to do if the ball is hit to him/her. Before each time you hit the ball, ask 2 or 3 players what they will do if the ball is hit to them, and tell them the correct answer if they can't tell you. Also, ask other players what they would do if the ball was hit somewhere else, and again provide instruction if they can't give the correct answer. This will teach them to be alert on every play. After the play is finished, use positive reinforcement to applaud the things that were done well, and provide instruction on what to do if mistakes were made. Do this in a positive manner as well, and make sure you repeat situations that players have difficulty with until they take the correct action. Get creative when you do this and incorporate situations that came up in your previous game, so players learn what to do when these things happen.

It is also particularly helpful to use this type of drill to apply the various rules on when a ball is dead, or how to end a play to stop the runners from advancing. Teaching the infielders when a ball is dead and helping them determine whether to make a play or merely end it is important at this level, and this skill can be developed during this portion of the practice.

Base running Simulations

Instead of focusing on team defense, you can again focus on just baserunning. It is still good to have your players swing a bat (and drop it – don't throw it!) and run to first. Again, teaching them to "run through" first base or turn and go to second or third or home is still a skill that will need to be developed at this age group. Learning to listen to their base coaches and not watching the ball while they run is critical at this age. Situational running drills that incorporate crazy instructions from coaches are good ways to emphasize and re-emphasize this. Done properly these running drills are fun for the kids, and good training for both them and your base coaches.

Individual Skill Development in a Team Game Setting

You can also use this time to turn individual skill development into a team game, as mentioned above. Dividing players into two teams and playing to a designated score is fun and really helps players focus on skill development in a somewhat meaningful situation. (The more you can simulate game-type situations in practice, the more comfortable your players will feel when they are in an actual game situation.)

Team Batting/Fielding Practice (15-20 Minutes)

This portion of practice helps to build both individual skill development and game awareness. To be effective, it should be done in a rather quick manner, and emphasize that everybody be ready on every pitch. A suggested format would be as follows:

- Divide your players into three teams (you can let them pick teams, have each coach pick a team, or try to divide them as evenly as possible yourself), and have one team be the hitting team, one team be the infield team, and one team be the outfield team.
- Each player on the hitting team gets 5-7 strikes (swings, or good pitches they don't swing at to teach them to go after the ball.) A player gets 1 point for a foul ball, three for a ball hit in the infield, five for a ball that bounces through the infield into the outfield, and 7 for a ball that is hit to the outfield on a fly.
- Defensively, teams can earn points by making plays on the balls that are hit. Groundballs stopped (but not caught) by infielders are worth one point, ground balls that are caught earn three points, and fly balls that are caught earn 5. In the outfield, ground balls that are stopped earn 1 point, those that are caught earn 3, and those that are caught on the fly earn 7 points.
- Before each pitch, the coach should hold the ball up, and when he does the defense should shout "down" and get into the ready position. As the coach releases the ball, the players should shout "creep" and take a step forward with both their right and left feet and get back into the fielding position. Failure to do so will cost a team 3 points per player. This keeps fielders alert and builds this attentiveness for game situations.
- After each batter completes his swings/strikes, the fielders rotate. Left goes to left-center, left center to right-center, right-center to right, and right all the way over to left. Infielders rotate from third base to short stop, from short stop to second base, from second base to first base, and from first base to third base.
- After the entire team is done batting that team rotates to the outfield, the outfield team goes to the infield, and the infield team bats. Once all teams have completed all rotations, total up the scores and announce the winner. Again, if you keep this moving and emphasize the players staying alert on every pitch, you can simulate a "game mentality" in addition to developing basic skills.

If this seems too complicated with all of the scoring, then try to simplify it as necessary, but think of creative ways to develop both skills and a game readiness during this period.

Practice Close Out (5-10 minutes)

At the end of practice, it is again good to close it out with something fun. Baserunning games and relays can be incorporated at this point, as can a game where they try to run after fly balls to catch them (maybe with tennis balls as needed), or even taking turns trying to hit a target on a backstop (or a ball bucket) or a soft toss screen, etc. Whatever you do, keep it upbeat and end the practice on a high note.

10/12 & Under (Player Pitch)

At this age, the number one goal is still to promote a love for the game and for sports in general; therefore, the environment should still consist of positive reinforcement and individual player development. You will now likely have players who have one or more years of baseball experience, but you will probably also have some new players who have never participated before. Therefore, it is still important to be sensitive to the abilities of each player and to tailor instruction to them as appropriate. As a result, much of the core instruction provided above for younger age groups still applies; however, you will have more players who will be able to move to more detailed aspects of specific skills. Knowing what your players can handle will be a key to helping them develop to the extent possible at this age.

Practice Structure

At these older levels, the core practice structure should still emphasize the very basic individual components of baseball, but also have a time where these are incorporated into a practical baseball team situation. With that in mind, assuming you now have about two hours, your practices could probably be structured along the following basic lines, but time allocations and instruction can be adjusted to fit the practice time available:

- 25 minutes- warm up, ground balls, throwing, etc. (see instructions below) (water break)
- 25-35 minutes- individual stations (Ideally break the kids into 2 or 3 groups depending on coach availability, and have coaches work with them on specific skills.) (Take a water break after station work is completed.) These stations would include:
 - Infield fielding/throwing, baserunning.
 - Outfield fielding/throwing, baserunning.
 - Hitting (soft toss/whiffle balls off to the side with designated coach)
 - Pitching/Catching (off to the side with designated coach)
- 30 minutes- team concept
 - Putting fielders in positions, having batters (or coach) hit and run. Have defense learn what to do with the ball. Move the kids around to different positions. Let them all hit, have them all figure out what to do if the ball is hit to them. Teach them to be ready, etc.
 - We'll discuss in more detail at the end of the section.
- 30 minutes- team batting/fielding practice
- 5-10 minutes- practice close-out, something fun.

Instructional Techniques

The same techniques employed in working with younger players should still be used in working with the older age groups as well. These are summarized again below as a reminder:

- Eyes and aggressive attitude: Continually emphasize that the eyes are the two most important things in baseball, and that the best way to play is to be aggressive and to go after the ball with their *tools* (their glove and their bat).
- Positive reinforcement: You can't overdo it in this area.
- Focus on individual development: Tailor your instruction to each player based on what they are physically able to accomplish and celebrate growth or attempted growth for all according to their abilities.
- Keep it simple: Players at this age will only be able to grasp one or two concepts at a time, so don't throw too much at them all at once. Think incremental growth, and not immediate development in all aspects of a skill.
- Keep it fun: While competition is important at this level, the main goal is still to emphasize a fun, learning environment that is positive and provides a sense of both individual and team achievement. Players should understand the importance of giving their best effort in support of team objectives to help both them and their team be the best that they can be. This is something they can then carry with them in other aspects of life as well.

The only difference with the older age groups is that you should be able to provide more technical instruction to those who are physically ready able to apply more advanced skills. As such, the drills you are able to incorporate in your practices should be a little bit more advanced and focus more on developing and improving fundamental principles.

Basic Skills Training

With the structure and coaching techniques described above in mind, here are some drills that you can incorporate in the various stages of practice outlined above.

Warm up, ground balls, throwing (25 minutes)

This section of practice can now be structured as follows:

- Stretching/warm up exercises (5 minutes)
- Playing catch, warming up (5 minutes)
- Ground balls, rolling bare hand, throwing with gloves (5 minutes)
- Throwing from base-to-base, around the horn (5 minutes)
- Throwing in rundowns (5 minutes)

The structure above assumes that most players will be able to play catch and field ground balls with some level of success. It also assumes that you would have one or two assistant coaches who can assist you in this basic instruction. After each player receives five ground balls bare-handed,

have them put their gloves on and back them up to the baseline between 2nd and 3rd base and field five thrown ground balls. Have them shout “down” and “creep” before each throw, so they assume the proper stance and are anticipating the ball being hit (thrown in this case) to them.

Next, break them into four groups and position them at each base (three at each base). Have them throw the ball around the horn once or twice in each direction. Again, teach them to have their bare hand near their glove when catching the throw so they can develop a quick release, and teach them to pivot quickly to get their body properly lined up when they throw. (This is particularly important when throwing in reverse order, as right-handers will need to shift their bodies to make an accurate throw in this direction.)

Finally, group players at two of the bases (usually first and second), and have them work on run-down fundamentals:

- Hold the ball up in their throwing hand and run toward the player who will be catching the ball (don’t continually fake like you’re going to throw it.)
- After three or four steps, the player “flips” the ball to the player at the next base and follows his/her throw and goes to the back of the line at that base.
- The player receives the ball provides a target with his/her glove, and catches the ball with their glove, but with their bare hand as close as possible, taking a step forward as they receive it.
- After receiving the ball, the player transfers it to their bare hand, holds it up, and begins running toward the other base, repeating the process described above.
- After each player makes a throw from each line, end the drill, have a water break, and move on to station work.

Station Work (25-35 minutes)

This section of the practice is the primary focal point for instruction in fundamentals and is ideally accomplished with at least three coaches. At these older age groups, you should be able to group your fielders by positions (infield/outfield) and tailor instruction more to these specific skills. If you have players who may play either the infield or the outfield, rotate them in both groups if possible, so they are able to practice both sets of skills.

At these older age levels, there are a variety of drills you can incorporate in working on infield, outfield, hitting, and pitching fundamentals, and many ideas are available on the internet and through instructional videos and books. At the end of this manual we have provided some ideas from the <http://www.helpful-baseball-drills.com/> website. Feel free to visit the website and/or incorporate the drills described in this packet. We’ve also included references to other materials at the end of this manual, which you are welcome to purchase or access as desired. Again, the main goal is to adapt teaching to the skill level of your players. With that in mind, here are some sample ideas of what these station drills might include.

- Infield Fielding/Throwing: At the older ages, you should consider the following drills as you work with your infielders:
 - Hit ground balls to each (5-10 depending on time), just so they see the ball come off the bat and develop the basic skill of catching ground balls. Remember to emphasize

the “eyes,” and have them be in the proper stance (“down”) and anticipate the ball coming to them (“creep”).

- After fielding a few ground balls, line them up at the infield positions and have them throw to first base. Work on getting force outs at second or third base as the season progresses, depending on the skill level of the group.
- Work on what to do in bunt situations: how to field the ball, who covers which base, etc.
- Work on fielding pop flies, especially those behind first and third base, teaching your middle infielders to make these types of plays. You can also throw pop flies near the fence and teach your infielders how to make these types of plays as well.

- Outfield Fielding/Throwing:

- Work on the basics of judging and catching flyballs and ground balls hit to the outfield.
- Work on charging ground balls and staying behind fly balls so their momentum is moving forward as they catch the ball.
- Work on developing the skill to “crow hop” in making throws to the infield so they are as strong as possible.
- Work on hitting a cut-off man stationed halfway between the coach and the outfielders, hitting them chest/head high (throwing it through them, not just to them).
- Have your cutoff men learn to catch the ball on their “throwing side” so they can quickly relay the ball to the appropriate base/player.
- Work on hitting/throwing flyballs in front of the fielders, over their heads, to one side or the other, teaching them to use the proper footwork and judgment in making these plays.

- Batting (Soft Toss/Whiffle Balls)

- Having a coach dedicated to working with 2-3 players at a time who rotate through this station is a “huge” benefit to any team. Have the coach pull one player from the outfield group, and one from the infield group, and rotate all players through this station.
- As one player from one group completes his/her swings, have them return to their fielding group and send another player over. They can field whiffle balls while the other player bats, then take their turn batting, then take their turn hitting, then return to their group.
- Minimize down time by having players bring their bats over to this station prior to the start of the station work, so they don’t waste time looking for their equipment.
- Incorporate the concepts of “loading up” and moving to the ball as it comes to them as discussed above.
- Incorporate more advanced concepts like bringing the hands quickly to the ball or rotating the hips (throwing their stomach at the ball) or staying back and “finishing” the swing with their weight properly distributed as your players are able to do so throughout the year.
- Again, the instructional materials referenced at the end of this manual are good resources for incorporating more advanced instruction as the year progresses.
- The goal is to get each player roughly 25 swings in a short period of time to provide the repetition necessary to develop this skill.

- Pitching/Catching

- Once again, having a coach dedicated to working with pitchers and catchers off to the side is almost essential to provide the amount of instruction necessary for players to develop the skills to be successful in these positions.

- Using the rotation method described for batting instruction above, you should be able to work with three pitchers and catchers during station work.
- Pitchers should start by making casual throws in front of the pitching mound and behind it (about 5-10 from each location) using the basic pitching motion just to ensure they are loose, and their arms are warmed up.
- Once they are warm, they should throw roughly 30 pitches to the catcher, who should be in full gear, including a protective cup.
- Instruction for pitchers should emphasize the basics, and try to develop repetition and consistency: (1) use the “eyes” to visualize where to throw the ball; (2) keep your body aligned with your target through your delivery; (3) stay balanced so your body will go where your eyes tell it to; (4) don’t go too fast so you’re in the proper position to make an accurate throw; and (5) stay “in sync” so you use your whole body and minimize the risk of arm injury.
- Instruction for catchers should likewise emphasize the basics, as follows: (1) being in the proper position to receive the ball when it is thrown; (2) using your protective gear to block balls thrown in the dirt, and staying in front of the ball; (3) being ready to make a quick release in the event that a runner may be stealing.

Again, the reference materials at the end of this manual provide additional sources of instruction you can incorporate as you see fit according to the needs and abilities of your players. MCPRD Youth Sports staff are also available for assistance and/or suggestions as requested as well.

Team Concept (30 minutes)

This section of the practice is dedicated to working on team situations (usually defensive) that will arise during the game so players will know how to respond when they happen. This time should be used to work on situations that maybe didn’t go well in the previous week’s game, or to anticipate possible things that may arise in the future. Potential ideas include:

- Cut-offs: Work on hitting balls to the outfield with runners in various positions and have outfielders and infielders work on making the appropriate play. This includes ensuring people know where to throw the ball, where to position themselves based on where they are playing and where the potential play will be, and what to look watch for in making the proper decision, etc.
- Rundowns: This can go hand in hand with working on cut-offs as the two frequently go together, especially if you get a baserunner “hung out” between bases. Ensuring players are using proper fundamentals and are positioned properly on rundowns can result in getting key outs that can get your team out of potentially big innings.
- Bunt Coverages: Putting runners in play, and having infielders work on concepts covered during station time is also something that can be emphasized during this team concept time.
- Baserunning Skills: Using live baserunners can benefit both your defense and your offensive baserunning awareness. Providing instruction to your baserunners while teaching your defensive players is also critical during this time.

Team Batting/Defensive Practice (30 minutes)

As described above for the 8U division, this time should emphasize both hitting and fielding and should take about 30 minutes. In addition, you should have your potential catchers put on the full gear and get practice fielding pitches that are thrown with a batter at the plate. They should ideally be rotated so that up to 3 catchers get work, and you can throw a couple of pitches in the dirt between batters to get them more work on this. You can also incorporate bunting as part of this drill, awarding points for bunts in particular areas marked on the field as well.

Practice Close-Out (5-10 minutes)

Once again, ending the practice with something fun closes everything out with a high note. Batting games such as *King of the Hill* are a great way to end things on a positive note, as are relay races. Whatever you choose, try to end the practice with something the players will enjoy.

Resources and Supporting Information

Coaching Baseball Successfully by Mike Curran with Ross Newhan. Published by Human Kinetics. Copyright 2007.

Coaching Baseball for Dummies by the National Alliance for Youth Sports (with Greg Bach). Published by Wiley Publishing. Copyright 2007.

www.helpful-baseball-drills.com

Baseball Skills & Drills by the American Baseball Coaches Association (Mark Johnson, Texas A&M University; Jack Leggett, Clemson University; Pat McMahon, Mississippi State University). Published by Human Kinetics. Copyright 2001.

Basic Pitching Mechanics for Young Pitchers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-X26cwxfRU>

Pitching Drills for Accuracy - 4 tips for more Control

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmn1xPxvK2w>

10 Nutrition Tips for the Young Athlete

1 Maximize with nutrient-packed foods

Give your body the nutrients it needs by eating a variety of nutrient-packed food, including whole grains, lean protein, fruits, and vegetables.

2 Energize with grains

Your body's quickest energy source comes from foods such as bread, pasta, oatmeal, cereals, and tortillas.

3 Power up with protein

Protein is essential for building and repairing muscle. Choose lean or low-fat cut and skinless meats. Quality protein sources come from plant-based foods.



4 Mix it up with plant protein foods

Choose beans and peas (kidney, pinto, black, or white beans; split peas; chick peas; soy products (tofu, tempeh, veggie burgers), unsalted nuts, and seeds.

5 Vary your fruits and vegetables

Get the nutrients your body needs by eating a variety of colors, in various ways. Choose fresh, frozen, low-sodium canned, dried, or 100 percent juice options.

6 Don't forget dairy

Foods like fat-free and low-fat milk, cheese, yogurt, and fortified soy beverages (soymilk) help to build and maintain strong bones needed for everyday activities.

7 Take your time

Savor your food. Eat slowly, enjoy the taste and textures, and pay attention to how you feel. Be mindful. Eating very quickly may cause you to eat too much.

8 Drink water

Stay hydrated by drinking water instead of sugary drinks. Keep a reusable water bottle with you to always have water on hand.

9 Know how much to eat

Get personalized nutrition information based on your physical activity level. This will allow you to keep eating a well-balanced diet to accomplish your goals.

10 Reach your goals

Reach your physical activity goals by eating healthy.

Resource can be found on [choosemyplate.gov](https://www.choosemyplate.gov)